

Two negatives make a positive by HollyMartins

Category: Doctor Sleep (2019), Doctor Sleep - Stephen King, IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Adopted Children, Adoption, Angst, Beverly Marsh & Richie Tozier Are Best Friends, Catholicism, Childhood Trauma, Depression, Domestic, Dreams and Nightmares, Eddie Kaspbrak & Richie Tozier Are Parents, Eddie Kaspbrak Loves Richie Tozier, Family Feels, Fix-It, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Kid Fic, Light Angst, M/M, Marriage, Medical Examination, Mentioned Sonia Kaspbrak, Minor Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Night Terrors, Post-Canon Fix-It, Post-IT Chapter Two (2019), References to Depression, Richie Tozier Has Issues, Richie Tozier Loves Eddie Kaspbrak, Stephen King References, The Shining References, doctor sleep references, extended Tozier family

Language: English

Characters: Abra Stone, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Dan "Danny" Torrance, Eddie Kaspbrak, Maggie Tozier, Mike Hanlon, Original Child Character(s), Original Tozier Character(s), Richie Tozier

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-10-07

Updated: 2019-12-13

Packaged: 2019-12-16 15:06:15

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 12

Words: 44,215

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Eddie and Richie embark on the most terrifying experience of all—parenthood.

Or, the author desperately needed a domestic, family fix-it for Richie and Eddie and it turned into a much longer, angstier exploration than I expected.

1. The Beginning

Author's Note:

This was supposed to just be a quick, cutesy one shot featuring Richie and Eddie as high-strung, eccentric parents. It turned into something longer, with a bit more angst and self-doubt than expected. These two just couldn't resist.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

If they had bothered to take a bet about something as domestic as being the first to have kids, the Losers would definitely not have selected Richie or Eddie. Probably Bev and Ben with their disgustingly sweet heterosexual agenda. Mike was too busy living his own life for the first time to even think about kids and Bill—the man can't finish a book, could he even finish impregnating a woman? Probably not.

But either way, Richie I-am-the-least-family-friendly-comic-you-can-imagine-and-take-several-different-anxiety-meds-otherwise-I'm-a-maniac-flightless-bird Tozier and Eddie children-are-walking-biohazards-and-I-too-would-have-to-hide-all-my-meds-and-fuck-that Kaspbrak never seemed the type to go down the parenthood road. Also, they both hated Disney movies.

So, when the rest of the Losers got a text from Eddie informing them that they were being put down as references for his and Richie's adoption caseworkers, it was a bit of a shock. Not that they were together, everyone already knew that.

If they hadn't been so busy trying not to get killed by an outer space clown demon during those days back in Derry, they would've seen it right away. And then afterwards, with Eddie slowly healing up in the

hospital and Richie never leaving his side (and having a full body, dry-heaving meltdown as Eddie was taken into surgery but the Losers are polite enough to not mention that) until Bev, Ben, Mike, and Bill all walked into the hospital room and saw Richie grasping Eddie's hand and using his other to gently brush at Eddie's hair. That made it kinda obvious. Though later Richie insisted that gazing lovingly into another man's eyes and holding hands were just things bros did for one another. Get out of here with your toxic masculinity.

But still, the becoming parents thing seemed out of nowhere, though it wasn't like the rest of the Losers spent all their time together so they weren't privy to the conversations Richie and Eddie shared about parenthood—which went about as calmly and rationally as one could expect.

“You know what I just realized?” Richie asked as he stood in front of the microwave.

“Hmm?” Eddie replied, not looking up from his paperwork he had spread out on the dining room table. It was one of his work from home days and though Richie tried to stay out of his way, it was impossible to share a living space with the man and not have his presence fill the entire house.

“None of us ever had any kids,” Richie continued, taking out the leftover Chinese food before the microwave beeped. “Isn't that weird?”

“What?”

“Us, the Losers,” he said, sitting across from Eddie at the table with his food. “We're all in our forties and not one of us had a kid. Even by accident.”

“Don't get soy sauce on my papers,” Eddie insisted, glaring at Richie's plate of lo mein and chicken and broccoli. “Wait, what? What are you talking about?”

Richie rolled his eyes.

“You don't think that's just a little bit weird that no one in our group

had a kid?" he asked. "I mean, you'd think one of the straight ones would've fucked up somewhere along the way."

Eddie furrowed his brow before shaking his head.

"Who cares?" he asked. "And isn't it a good thing none of us have kids? We're not exactly the picture of stable, functional adulthood."

Richie shrugged and lapsed into silence as he ate. Eddie stared at him.

"What made you think of that anyway?"

Richie shrugged again.

"Just a random thought," he admitted. "You and Myra never slipped one past the goalie?"

Eddie raised an eyebrow as his stomach lurched at the mere thought.

"Are you seriously asking about me knocking up my ex-wife?"

"Well, I'm only curious," Richie replied, lifting his hands. "Your mom and I talked about giving you a baby brother a ton but you know, once menopause hit, that dream was over."

Eddie rolled his eyes and shook his head.

"You're an idiot," he muttered, and turned back to his work.

They were both silent for several minutes, though Eddie could feel Richie's eyes on him as he loudly slurped up egg noodles. He pointedly ignored him. It would only be a matter of moments before Richie burst out with whatever inane comment he just had to make to fill the silence.

"You know what would be hilarious?" he asked suddenly.

Eddie sighed and sat back, gazing at Richie with what he hoped was a look of annoyance but suspected merely appeared fond.

"What?" he asked.

“If we were the first ones to have kids.”

Eddie stared at Richie in shock, his mouth going slack.

“What?” he repeated dumbly.

“I mean, out of our group, no one would expect us two to become a cute, domestic family. Everyone’s probably got their money on Ben and Bev raising an army of future supermodels but it would be much funnier if we beat them to it.”

Eddie blinked at Richie’s smile.

“You think it would be funny to have kids?”

“Well, not ‘ha ha’ funny but—”

“What the fuck are you talking about? Why the fuck would we have kids?”

A strange shadow passed over Richie’s face and Eddie’s heart twisted painfully. He had inadvertently fucked up. But before he could apologize or even find out just what he was apologizing for, Richie shrugged once again.

“Jesus, it was just a joke, man, calm your tits.”

He stood up with his now empty plate and retreated into the kitchen, Eddie staring after him and, once again, contemplating the enigma that was Richie Tozier’s thought process.

Eddie was reminded of that bizarre conversation a month later, when he stood to the side as he waited for Richie to finish with autographs and pictures after a show. Eddie yawned. Why comedy shows had to start and end so late, he had no idea. Perhaps people laughed more when they were delirious with exhaustion.

A young voice caught his attention and he turned to watch Richie kneel down and sign a ticket for a couple of kids. They couldn’t have been more than fourteen and Eddie wondered what parent allowed

them to attend Richie's decidedly R-rated show when he was suddenly struck by the smile on Richie's face.

Unlike one of Richie's shit-eating grins or even his sarcastic smirk, this smile was similar to the one only Eddie usually got to see. It was calm and gentle and totally carefree. Richie handed them back their tickets and nodded when they shyly asked for a picture.

"Sure," he replied. "Eds, come here and take a picture for us."

Eddie removed his hands from his pockets and stepped up, taking one of the kids' phones. He stared down at the screen.

"Wait, how—" he began.

"Oh, it's already open on Snap," the kid replied. "Just press the circle at the bottom."

"Yeah, press the circle, Eds," Richie said, grinning. "Don't you know how Snapchat works?"

"No, because I'm not twelve," Eddie snapped. Then he looked at the kids. "No offense."

They just laughed and Richie grinned as he put his arms around their shoulders and yelled, "Cheese, bitches!" Eddie took the photo.

That night, the two men stood at the bathroom sink as they brushed their teeth and elbowed one another out of the way. Eddie gazed at the other man's reflection in the mirror and tried to imagine Richie in the suburbs, at a PTA meeting, reading a report card, coaching little league. He huffed a laugh and nearly choked on his toothbrush.

"The fuck's wrong with you?" Richie asked, spitting out the last of his toothpaste.

"Nothing, nothing," Eddie said quickly and rinsed out his mouth. "You had a good show tonight."

"Fuck yeah, I did," Richie replied, wiping his mouth on his arm.

“Wanna fool around?”

Eddie rolled his eyes but didn't step back when Richie took his face in his hands and began kissing him. They made it out of the bathroom and into their bedroom, only tripping twice in between kisses, when Eddie pulled away.

“Since when do you know how to use Snapchat?” he asked.

“Dude, it's existed for nearly a decade,” Richie replied. “Bev and I snap each other all the time.”

“That sounds vaguely sexual.”

“Oh, trust me,” Richie said, grinning lasciviously, “there's nothing vague about it.”

Eddie rolled his eyes again but smiled into the next kiss. They collapsed onto their bed, Richie's hands crawling underneath Eddie's oversized and faded Nirvana t-shirt, fingers gently running over the raised scar tissue on his chest. His lips found Eddie's neck and he hummed as he kissed him, knowing that Eddie always complained in the morning when he found a hickey.

“You're like a fucking teenager,” Eddie moaned, his fingers carding through Richie's unruly hair.

“I even got the stamina of one,” Richie answered in between kisses.

“Bullshit.”

“Watch me.”

“You threw your back out two months ago when we fucked on the floor.”

“If we had stayed on the kitchen table, that probably wouldn't have happened.”

“That's disgusting,” Eddie said, wrinkling his nose. “We eat there.”

Richie laughed and reached down for Eddie's boxers, his hand

wrapping around his erection. Eddie groaned.

“Fuck, I’m not gonna last if you keep that up,” he bit out as Richie ran his thumb over the head.

“The whole point is to make you come,” Richie replied, his breath heavy against his ear.

“But—”

“I know you,” Richie huffed. “It’s late and we’re old and tired. Just jerk me off, too, and we’ll call it a night.”

“How romantic,” Eddie replied, “oh fuck.”

He reached down and grasped Richie in his hand, eliciting a delicious moan from the other man. Eddie smirked. He always felt smug when Richie made noise though for the next several minutes, they were silent aside from the occasional moan or “oh, fuck.” Eddie was secretly relieved when Richie was the first to tense against him. Stamina of a teenager my ass, he thought.

“Fuck,” Richie groaned against his ear as he came with Eddie following shortly thereafter. “Fuck, that was nice, Eduardo.”

“Shut up,” Eddie gasped. “We need a washcloth.”

Richie sat up and swiped off his own Jurassic Park t-shirt and wiped them off before chucking it in the general direction of the hamper.

“I hate you,” Eddie moaned, shaking his head slowly against the pillow. Richie grinned before collapsing beside him on the bed.

“You love me,” he sighed, the smile never leaving his face.

“Yeah,” Eddie admitted, “I really fucking do.”

Richie leaned over and shut off the bedside lamp before gently kissing Eddie.

“Good night, Eds,” he whispered.

“Good night, Richie.”

Weeks later, they were both sitting in their tiny, concrete backyard on one of the rare occasions where they were both off from work. Richie was scribbling in one of his notebooks, fresh material ideas flowing through his brain, and Eddie was flipping through magazines and sipping iced tea. Aside from the distant sound of traffic and their neighbor’s phone conversation, it was quite peaceful...until Eddie snort-laughed.

“What?” Richie asked, not looking up from his notebook.

“Nothing, just...” Eddie turned the magazine around to show Richie. “Doesn’t this kid look just like you?”

Richie glanced up and frowned.

“Who’s that?”

“One of the kids from that show on Netflix.”

Richie peered at the photo and then shook his head.

“Looks nothing like me.”

“Richie, that’s you at age 12,” Eddie insisted. “I mean, like a clone. You sure you didn’t bang any women back in your twenties?”

“I can promise you, I’ve never even seen a naked woman in person,” Richie replied, “let alone slip my dick in one.”

“Donate semen for cash?”

“I should’ve. I was fucking broke for most of my twenties.”

“Well, this kid is the spitting image of you.”

Richie shrugged and went back to his notebook. Eddie resumed his reading.

“He’s in a show?” Richie asked suddenly. “A TV show?”

“Yeah, something to do with kids battling evil in some small town in the 80s.”

Richie looked up, eyes wide.

“Did Bill write it?” he asked.

Eddie laughed.

“No, I think it’s just a rip-off of The Goonies or E.T. Looks kind of interesting though. Apparently, 80s nostalgia is a thing now.”

Richie snorted dismissively.

“Nostalgia for the 80s,” he repeated. “Fuck that.”

“Oh come on, Riche,” Eddie replied, “aside from the killer alien clown, it wasn’t all bad. There was Atari and Hall and Oates.”

“And Ronald fuckin’ Reagan and AIDS and threats of nuclear war,” Richie said, counting on his fingers. “No, it wasn’t for me.”

Eddie shrugged.

“Well, maybe I’ll check out that show. See if that kid sounds like you, too.”

Richie shook his head again, a pinched look on his face.

“I don’t like kids on TV,” he muttered.

“Huh?” Eddie asked, furrowing his brow. “What do you mean?”

“The whole child actors thing,” Richie said, waving his hand vaguely. “It creeps me out. Whenever I see a kid in a movie or a show, I can’t help but wonder if they actually want to be there or it was a parent pushing them.”

“Sure, but some of those kids must want to act or whatever.”

“I’m telling you, Eds, kids just want to be kids. I’ve met a few stage parents in my time. Fucking monsters.”

“Richie—”

“Let me tell you, I’d never let my kid go into show business,” Richie continued firmly. “In fact, the moment I had a kid, I’d pack up and get the fuck outta Dodge. Los Angeles is the last place I’d want to raise a family.”

Eddie blinked at the other man, who looked oddly vexed over a conversation about hypotheticals. Richie caught Eddie’s glance and immediately looked down at his notebook, color rising to his face.

“Um, okay,” Eddie muttered. He put the magazines down on the patio table. “Richie, do you—”

“I gotta make a phone call,” Richie said, standing abruptly, hip bumping into the table and sending his empty glass crashing to the ground. “Shit.”

“I got it,” Eddie replied, lifting his hand to stop Richie. “Go make your phone call.”

Richie swallowed and nodded, retreating quickly to the back door. Just as he was about to disappear inside the house, Eddie called, “We’re not done talking yet!” Richie tensed ever so slightly before rushing into the house.

Richie avoided him for the rest of the afternoon, retreating to his laptop and oversized headphones. Eddie let him be and decided on doing one of the things he did best: research. As daylight faded into evening, both men were studiously at work and it wasn’t until Richie’s stomach grumbled that he dared venture down the hall and to the kitchen, where Eddie was sitting with his own laptop at the dining room table.

“Hey,” he said, awkwardly shifting from foot to foot, “so, like, are you hungry? Or did you eat dinner?”

“I didn’t eat,” Eddie replied, eyes not moving from his laptop screen. “I think there’s some leftover zoodles.”

“You sound ridiculous when you call them that,” Richie mumbled, opening the fridge and frowning. “What about eggs? Nothing better than breakfast for dinner.”

“Sure,” Eddie replied, typing feverishly.

Richie rolled his eyes and took out the eggs and turkey bacon. God, he hated that shit but at least it was better than zoodles.

Both men were silent as Richie cooked, though Eddie now snuck peeks at the other man. He still appeared on edge, as if waiting for the other shoe to fall. Poor dude, Eddie thought. After everything that had happened in Derry, Richie still had trouble opening up about his feelings. Well, if anyone knew that it took a long fucking time to confront one’s issues, it was Eddie. He could be patient.

Richie turned and carried two plates to the table, placing one in front of Eddie.

“Thanks, babe,” he said, shutting his laptop and pushing it to the side.

“You’re lucky you got me,” Richie said, sitting across from him. “You’d starve otherwise.”

“I’d survive.”

“No, you wouldn’t.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Eddie admitted as he dug into his breakfast-dinner. “Do you want kids?”

Richie was fond of bad jokes but even he wasn’t clichéd enough to start choking and spit out his food in shock. Instead, he paled rapidly—so much so that Eddie got mildly concerned and was about to ask if he felt light-headed—and gently placed his fork down on the table. He looked at Eddie, his eyes bright, opened his mouth several times before finally saying, “I need a drink.”

“Oh, come on,” Eddie answered, rolling his eyes. “You’re being dramatic.”

"I'm always dramatic."

"Let's just talk about this," Eddie continued, "like rational adults."

"We're not rational adults."

"Then let's pretend for a few moments." Eddie sat back in his chair and placed his own fork on the table. "Richie, do you want kids?"

Richie quickly shook his head.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"What? Of course, it matters."

"Why?"

Eddie blinked.

"Because we're a couple and couples discuss shit like this."

Richie shook his head again.

"We already talked about it."

Eddie blinked again.

"We did?" he asked. "When the fuck did we ever talk about having kids?"

"Like a month or two ago," Richie replied, carelessly waving his hand.

Eddie searched his memory for anything even slightly resembling this conversation but came up blank. He shook his head at Richie, frowning, who sighed and rolled his eyes.

"When we talked about how none of us have kids! None of the Losers," he insisted.

"Oh, yeah, but we didn't talk about us having kids."

"Yes, we did and you said 'why the fuck would we have kids,'

remember?”

Eddie stared at Richie in shock. He took in Richie’s pinched expression, his arms crossed over his chest defensively. Eddie could hear him jiggling his knee up and down, a common nervous trait of Richie’s. He felt his heart crack.

“Richie, that wasn’t...I didn’t mean...”

“I get it, I do,” Richie said quickly. “I mean, none of us are actually stable, functional adults like you said, and I’m probably the least stable and functional out of all of us.”

“That’s not true.”

“It’s fine, Eds, I’m agreeing with you.”

“Beep beep, Richie.”

Richie clenched his mouth shut and glared.

“First of all, that wasn’t a let’s sit down and talk about our future conversation,” Eddie replied. “Or if it was, I didn’t realize it and I apologize. But—” he raised his hand to stop Richie from opening his mouth, “you have to admit, it did sound like a hypothetical idea, right?”

Richie shrugged.

“If that was your way of starting this sort of conversation, I’m sorry,” Eddie continued. “So let’s start again, totally fresh and trying, for once, to ignore our baggage.”

“That’s gonna be hard,” Richie snorted.

“That’s what she said but go on,” Eddie said, smirking.

“Fuck you, that joke’s old as shit.” Richie sighed again and ran a hand down his face. He looked tired, Eddie observed, and a little bit scared. He reached across the table and took Richie’s free hand and squeezed, eliciting a tentative smile from the other man. “Okay, I...I never really thought about having kids because I was never once in

good enough place to even consider being a dad. But I always secretly kinda hoped that one day...it could happen. But even then I'd get depressed because the idea of doing it alone terrified me and I had already resigned myself to a fate of perpetual singledom and unattached quick fucks on the road."

Eddie squeezed his hand again and rubbed his thumb along the top of Richie's hand.

"Then everything happened with Derry and we got together and holy shit, life isn't sucking so fucking hard now and I think we make a kick ass team," Richie continued. Eddie smiled. "And we've been together now for a bit and I think, what with everything we've been through and thirty years of repressing pining, we're both in this deep and I can't help but think that, together, we could make some cool ass parents."

He exhaled shakily and rested his head in his other hand, as if all that talking had exhausted him, though Eddie knew for a fact that Richie gained his strength from talking.

"Okay," Eddie said, nodding firmly. "So, can I give my thoughts?"

Richie nodded solemnly.

"I never wanted kids," he began and tried to not backtrack when Richie immediately winced, "but that's because I spent my entire adult life in a fucked-up, co-dependent, shithole marriage. I barely had time to breathe, let alone think about kids and I knew that the last thing I would want to bring into that household was an innocent kid. I mean, it would be my childhood all over again between me and Myra."

"You're not like her," Richie insisted.

"But I am like my mom."

"No," Richie said firmly, gripping Eddie's hand, "you're not like her in the least. You would never do to a kid when she did to you."

Eddie swallowed and looked down.

“Either way, kids weren’t an option,” he said softly. “And yeah, I hadn’t really thought about kids with you because I didn’t want to rock the boat. I mean, this is the first happy relationship I’ve ever had and I just wanted to hold onto it.”

Richie nodded. “I get that,” he said.

“But I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and researching and risk assessing,” Eddie took a deep breath and gazed up at Richie, “and yeah, there’s a lot of fucking risks with having kids but there’s no one in the world I’d rather raise a family with than you.”

Richie’s face, always expressive, did something Eddie hadn’t seen since he had agreed to move in—it lightened, and all the worries and tension disappeared, revealing a face that looked ten years younger.

“You’re not just saying that?” Richie asked gently, hope rising to his eyes.

“Have I ever fucking lied to you?” Eddie asked.

“You told me you fucked my mom.”

“That wasn’t a lie,” Eddie said, grinning.

Richie laughed and leaned across the table, capturing Eddie’s lips with his own.

“Ugh, you taste like turkey bacon,” Eddie mumbled between kisses.

“Your fault for buying that shit,” Richie murmured against his lips.

Eddie nodded and kissed him back before suddenly remembering something.

“Wait,” he said, “I have some info to show you.”

“What? What info?”

“Like I said, I did some research,” he continued and reached for his laptop. “I mean, it was only one afternoon but I got some good stuff on adoption versus fostering versus surrogacy, um, what social

workers look for, income issues, timing, oh, healthcare, obviously and—”

“Just please tell me you didn’t make a PowerPoint,” Richie said, a dreamy smile on his face.

“No, but there are graphs.”

“Fuck me, Eds.”

“Alright, that first and then graphs.”

They discussed every option. They weighed every variable. They argued and made up and finally agreed on adoption. But first, a few things had to be settled. One, they got married. It just made sense. Much to the Losers’ disappointment, it just a quick stop to city hall, no fuss, no reception. They didn’t even wear suits. But they did invite the Losers to a weekend-long we-got-married celebration at their home which involved lots of eating and drinking and not a few tears and an embarrassing amount of hugs. Then they followed Richie’s idea and moved out of Los Angeles. Neither wanted to admit it but they had both missed the east coast, and, after dozens of pros and cons lists from Eddie, settled in New Jersey, so they could be near the ocean and close enough to New York for Richie to easily access comedy clubs.

After settling down, they began the adoption process in earnest and, as Eddie had warned Richie, it took a long time. There were forms and case workers, meetings and counseling, high hopes and false starts. More than once they had been disappointed and had returned to their new home disheartened. At one point, they had to consider the possibility of it simply not working out for them.

“Maybe it’s for the best,” Eddie whispered one night. “Maybe...maybe I shouldn’t be a parent, after all.”

Richie turned and stared at him, his eyes wide and wet.

“What?” he asked, his voice thick. “What are you saying?”

Eddie shook his head and rubbed his eyes tiredly.

“All the counseling in the world can’t change my upbringing,” he sighed. “What if we got a kid and I did turn into my mother?”

Richie sat up on his elbows, a determined look on his face.

“No,” he said firmly. “You are not your mother, Eddie. You’d never be like her.”

“But—”

“We’re gonna have a kid,” Richie continued, “and you’re going to do everything in your power to make sure they have a much better life than we ever did. Because that’s the type of person you are.”

“Rich...”

“And besides, even if you started to inch towards acting like your mom, I’d be there to bring you back.”

Eddie swallowed.

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Eddie reached up and carded his fingers through Richie’s hair as the other man leaned down to kiss him.

“It’s going to happen for us,” he whispered. “I know it.”

Eddie nodded and, wrapping his arms around Richie, kissed his husband again.

It did eventually happen for them.

Lydia came into their lives with a burst of color, a breath of fresh air, and a smile that could light up the entire Eastern seaboard.

They adopted her at five-years-old but the ease with which she

adapted to her forever family and the overwhelming love at first sight for both Richie and Eddie made it seem as if she had been theirs since birth. Sometimes, neither man could understand how they had survived without their bright, clever daughter in their lives.

When they had first started this process, they had been warned about trauma, about difficulty adjusting, about the need for patience and understanding when it came to adopting a child. They had been fully prepared to engage any child they adopted in counseling, to practice mindfulness techniques with them, to simply be there with open hearts and minds. After all, both men were quite familiar with the lingering effects of trauma and steadfastly refused to allow any child of theirs to suffer.

So, they did all this for Lydia, though by all accounts, she didn't seem to need any of it. She was just a happy and healthy child and, though the first five years of her life had been filled with uncertainty and upheaval, seemed more well-adjusted than her parents. Still, both Richie and Eddie did whatever they could to empower their daughter. Whether it was Richie constantly playing Beyoncé's "Run the World" and singing wildly off-key with Lydia to Eddie taking her to kid-friendly yoga classes, they were determined to do better than their own parents.

Eddie, in particular, was fervent in this desire and promised himself that he would never lie to her. Then, a little less than a year into their being a family, she asked him a question.

"What's this?" she asked one morning while eating pancakes.

"What's what?" Eddie replied, surreptitiously inching the syrup bottle away from his daughter.

Lydia sat up on her knees and pointed a sticky finger at the side of his face. Eddie's heart dropped and a wave of cold panic welled up inside him. He felt short of breath and his mouth went dry.

Say something, he thought, say something to her. Don't lie. She's looking at you. Say something, you idiot.

"It's a scar from a boo boo," Richie said suddenly, his hand on Eddie's

shoulder. He sat at the table beside him and placed his own plate of pancakes in front of him.

Eddie exhaled shakily and turned slowly towards his husband. Richie tried to smile reassuringly but Eddie could see the fear and anxiety in his husband's eyes.

"Oh," Lydia replied before taking another big bite of pancake. "A boo boo from what?"

Eddie tightened his grip on his fork and tried to swallow as he gazed at his young, sweet, unsuspecting daughter. She looked up at him and smiled, syrup coating her chin and lips.

Don't lie to her.

"An accident," he gasped out. "A long time ago."

Lydia nodded and turned back to her pancakes. Eddie exhaled shakily and looked down at his lap, acutely aware of Richie's eyes trained on him. The two men finished eating silently as Lydia happily babbled about her day.

If either Richie or Lydia noticed that Eddie was being oddly quiet that day, they didn't mention it. They went about their routine as they normally would—snacks, a trip to the library and then the grocery store, helping Lydia finish her homework packet, etc.

Richie and Lydia were able to replace Eddie's silence with their own constant chatter. Eddie walked a couple paces behind the two in the grocery store, and watched them interact. Lydia was holding the shopping list and checking off items with a crayon as Richie pushed the cart. They were discussing the different types of graham crackers and which were tastier, a debate that was becoming increasingly animated. Eddie smiled and felt an odd tightening in his chest.

Richie had always been totally at ease with their daughter. The two had quickly become attached at the hip and sometimes, Eddie couldn't help but feel he was intruding into their relationship. It was a painfully familiar feeling—he had been an outlier in his own

marriage to Myra.

A tug on his arm broke him abruptly out of his memories. He blinked and gazed down at Lydia.

“Daddy,” she insisted, “I’m talking to you.”

“I’m sorry,” he said and ran a hand over his face. “What is it, sweetheart?”

“Can we get this?” She held up a box of sugary, colorful cereal.

“No, that’s yucky, and we have cereal at home.”

She pouted and Eddie prepared himself for an argument he was sure to lose when Richie placed his hand on her tiny shoulder.

“That stuff tastes like cardboard,” he said. “Trust me, I’ve eaten cardboard.”

Lydia laughed and allowed Richie to take the cereal out of her hands and back on the shelf. They went back to their shopping and Eddie couldn’t help but notice she held Richie’s hand for the rest of the trip.

Eddie couldn’t sleep. It was a little past one am and the house was silent aside from his rapidly beating heart.

He hadn’t a night like this in a long time. He sighed and rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hands. Perhaps if he moved slowly, he could slip out of bed without waking Richie, who, as usual, was sleeping with an arm and a leg thrown over him. Maybe if he managed to replace himself with a pillow, Richie might not notice the difference.

Just as he was considering how best to move the pillow behind him, Richie’s arm tightened around Eddie’s middle. Eddie stilled, holding his breath and waiting for Richie to groggily ask why he was still awake but he remained silent. Eddie exhaled a shaking breath and inched closer to the edge of the bed when Richie’s arm tightened again and this time, Eddie noticed that his once steady breathing was shallow.

Eddie gazed at his husband's sleeping face. His brow was furrowed. Something was not right. Slowly, Eddie reached his hand over, thinking to run it gently through Richie's wild hair, when Richie tensed again and, without warning, shot up from the bed, arms flailing, and screamed, "No!"

"Richie, hey, hey," Eddie whispered urgently, his hands on either side of Richie's face, trying to catch his wide eyes. "Look at me, it's alright. You're home. You're safe."

Richie stared blankly above Eddie, gasping shallowly and sweat beading on his forehead. He grasped Eddie's wrist tightly and swallowed before meeting his gaze.

"Eddie," he gasped.

"Breathe slowly," Eddie pressed. "Do it with me. In and out."

Richie mimicked Eddie's breathing until his chest stopped heaving. He clenched his eyes shut and Eddie's heart lurched to see a tear leak out from the corner of one.

"It's alright, baby," he whispered. "You're safe now."

Richie nodded and exhaled a shaking breath before opening his eyes. Eddie smiled reassuringly, though he could still see fear in Richie's gaze.

"DADDY. PAPA."

The sound of his daughter wailing their names jolted Richie. He sat up.

"Shit," he muttered.

"It's okay," Eddie insisted. "I'll get her. You rest."

"No, no," Richie said. "Let me."

"I—" But Richie was already up and out of bed, hurrying out of their bedroom and down the hall. Eddie sighed and tiredly ran a hand over his face. Lydia always seemed to prefer Richie's embrace, anyway. He

looked up at the sound of footsteps and frowned. Eddie was standing in the doorway, Lydia in his arms and her face buried against his chest, sniffing. He offered a sheepish smile to Eddie.

“Looks like we both had bad dreams,” he said gently.

Eddie sighed and pulled back the covers. Richie grinned and carried Lydia to bed, tenderly placing her down and tucking her in before climbing in beside her.

“What happened, sweetheart?” Eddie asked, brushing her hair from her face. His heart lurched again at the sight of tears in her eyes.

“Bad dream,” she hiccuped.

“I had one, too,” Richie whispered.

“You did?” Lydia asked, turning towards him with wide eyes.

“Yeah,” Richie replied. “Grown-ups get bad dreams, too.”

“But they’re not real,” Eddie said quickly. He felt Richie turn his gaze towards him but he ignored it. “Bad dreams can’t hurt you.”

Lydia nodded, rubbing at her eyes. Eddie glanced up to see Richie frowning before he offered a tired smile to their daughter.

“And no matter how scary the bad dreams are,” he offered gently, “we’re here to protect you.”

Lydia smiled before yawning.

“Go to sleep,” Eddie whispered. “You’ll be alright now. I promise.”

She tapped at her cheek and Richie laughed before leaning down to kiss her gently, followed by Eddie.

“Sleep now, kiddo,” Richie said. “No more bad dreams for either of us tonight.”

“Uh-huh,” she murmured as she closed her eyes.

Eddie turned onto his back and tried to follow his daughter and sleep.

When he opened his eyes again, the soft blue light of early morning was filling the room. He attempted to sit up but immediately groaned, his neck and back stiff. Glancing down, he saw why. Lydia was starfished in the bed, one tiny foot under his back and an arm around his neck.

“Hang on, Eds,” Richie whispered.

Eddie stayed still as he felt Richie effortlessly maneuver their daughter out from underneath him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her stretch and immediately turn and latched onto Richie, her head resting on his chest.

“She’s out cold,” he said. “You can get up if you want.”

Eddie slowly sat up, propped some pillows behind his back, and gazed down at their sleeping daughter. She always seemed smaller when she slept.

“Were you able to sleep at all last night?” Richie asked quietly.

Eddie shrugged.

“I guess so,” he muttered. “What about you? After your dream?”

Richie swallowed and began running a hand through their daughter’s curls. Eddie wondered if he was simply replacing his nervous tic of playing with his own hair but said nothing.

“I don’t know,” Richie admitted. “I think I kept falling asleep and then waking up abruptly, just to check that you and Lydia were still here. And real.”

“I have nights like those.”

“I thought they’d slow down by now,” Richie sighed. “I mean, we’re parents now. We have a shit ton more to worry about than our own childhood trauma.”

“I read that parenthood often brings those issues of childhood up to

the surface again.” Eddie longed to reach out and lay a gentle hand on his daughter but he resisted.

“Well, fuck me, then,” Richie muttered and, with his free hand, rubbed at his eyes tiredly.

“What was your dream about?”

“You really gonna ask me that now?”

“Yeah, I mean,” Eddie said, fidgeting slightly under his husband’s weary gaze, “we used to always talk about our nightmares and fears.”

“Used to?” Richie frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Eddie inwardly winced and shook his head.

“Nothing, just...” he searched for the words helplessly.

“She was there with us,” Richie said softly. “In the sewers.”

Eddie raised his eyes to his husband. Richie’s own eyes had an odd, out-of-focus look to them and the hand playing with his daughter’s hair had stilled.

“Lydia?” Eddie whispered.

Richie nodded slowly.

“It had her,” he continued. “It had both of you. And the others just wanted to leave you two behind in the fucking sewer.”

“Richie...”

“And when I went into her room after I woke up, I was so certain I was going to walk into It there. That’s why I wouldn’t let you get her. I had to see for myself that she was safe.”

Eddie reached his arm over their sleeping daughter and rested his hand on the side of Richie’s face. He was shivering.

“It wasn’t real,” he whispered.

Richie met his gaze.

“You said that to her last night,” he said. “But we both know that’s not true.”

“It’s not real anymore,” Eddie insisted. “Rich, it’s over. We won.”

Richie shook his head.

“It may be dead but there’s always fear. It never goes away. And it could get her.”

Eddie blinked before running his thumb gently along Richie’s cheekbone. He smiled.

“And here I thought you were the calm, cool as a fucking cucumber parent,” he whispered.

Richie huffed a laugh and shook his head again.

“I’m fucking terrified,” he admitted.

“I hate to say it,” Eddie smiled, “but I think that’s normal for most parents.”

Richie nodded and leaned down, placing a kiss on the crown of their daughter’s head.

“Do you think we’re fucking this up, Eds?” Richie whispered.

Eddie sighed and shook his head gently.

“I think we’re both too fucked up already to do any worse,” he said. “Like how two negatives make a positive.”

“You were always better at math than me.”

“I’m serious, though,” Eddie insisted. He reached under Richie’s chin and tilted his head up to meet his gaze. Eddie felt his heart leap. “Together, I think we got this.”

Richie smiled and made to move towards him when he realized he was essentially trapped in the embrace of their daughter. Eddie

grinned and leaned down to kiss him deeply.

“Hey,” a young, sleepy voice said, “that’s gross.”

“You’re gross, young grasshopper,” Richie replied before leaning down to blow a raspberry on the side of her face.

“Ew, stop it! Stop it,” Lydia begged in between giggles.

“I’ll rescue you,” Eddie said and gathered her into his arms. She laughed and hugged him tightly. “You’re safe now, sweetheart.”

“I know,” she said happily.

2. Richie and Beverly

Summary for the Chapter:

A look into Richie and Beverly's friendship as parenthood is thrown into the mix.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

“How many godfathers can one kid have?”

“Richie, we’re agnostic.”

“Hey, I believe in God, I just don’t trust organized religion,” Richie replied, hanging the framed Princess Leia poster before stepping back to observe it. “Or any organizations, now that I think about it.”

“It’s crooked. Move it to the right like an inch,” Eddie said. “And she doesn’t need godparents.”

“Course she does,” Richie said, maneuvering the frame slowly as if it were a tempermental bomb. “I mean, obviously Bev will be godmother and I guess that means Ben should be godfather but we can’t play favorites with the guys like that.”

“Did you have godparents? And it’s straight now, quit messing with it.”

“Yeah,” Richie said. “My great uncle Jim and my mom’s cousin Valerie. I’ve told you about her before. She took me to my first Pride when I was twenty because surprise, she was a lesbian and no one knew. Even though she and her roommate Laura shared a one bedroom apartment in New York.”

Eddie laughed and shook his head.

“I’d pay money to see you at Pride as some lanky, awkward kid,” he said.

“Oh man,” Richie said, grinning, “I was such a twink back then.”

“And what the hell are you now?”

Richie shrugged.

“I don’t know. Sloppy otter? Is that still a thing?”

“You’re asking the wrong guy,” Eddie said. He gazed around the room and his smile widened. “I gotta say, this is a pretty awesome kid’s room.”

“Hell yeah it is,” Richie replied, stepping beside his husband and putting his arm around his shoulders. “She’s gonna love it.”

They were both silent for several long moments, content to simply be in one another’s presence in their child’s room when Richie squeezed Eddie’s shoulder.

“I can’t believe it’s finally happening,” he admitted softly.

“I know,” Eddie agreed. “You’re gonna be a good dad.”

Richie colored briefly before gently hip-checking Eddie.

“So are you,” he said.

Eddie merely smiled.

Richie picked up the phone on the second ring.

“Bev!” he shouted.

“Richie!” she shouted back, laughing. “How are you?”

“Oh, you know, exhausted, covered in glitter, and haven’t showered in days,” he replied. Lydia lifted up her latest drawing and he gave her a thumbs up. She grinned and grabbed another piece of construction paper. “So just like college all over again.”

Bev laughed.

“I wish we went to college together,” she said wistfully.

“Oh, we’d be expelled instantly if some university was stupid enough to accept both of us,” he said. “So what’s going on?”

“Well, I finally had time to sit and watch all the videos you sent yesterday,” she answered. “And I have to say, Lydia is the sweetest, smartest, cutest kid I’ve ever seen.”

“Aw,” Richie said. He moved the phone away from his mouth and loudly whispered, “Lyds, my friend Bev thinks you’re cute and smart and sweet.”

“Who’s Bev?” Lydia asked.

“My friend, you’ll meet her soon.” Richie returned the phone to his ear. “When are you and Ben coming by?”

“Soon, I hope,” she said. “Ben’s finishing up a big project but this summer should be free and clear. What about the other Losers?”

“I don’t know, I want to do a BBQ with all of you so you can meet Lydia at the same time,” he said.

“I don’t like BBQ,” Lydia pointed out. “I like macaroni and cheese.”

“I’ll make macaroni and cheese, I promise,” Richie said.

“You cook now?” Bev asked.

“Don’t sound so surprised,” he shot back. “I had been surviving on

my own for twenty years, thank you.”

“I just can’t believe you’re a dad now,” Bev sighed wistfully.

“Well, you better believe it because I lost the receipt so this kid is nonrefundable,” he said, reaching out and tussling her hair, causing her to playfully bat away his hand.

Bev laughed.

“You sound happy, you know that?” she said.

Richie blinked. He hadn’t really thought about it but he supposed he was. A warm wave filled his chest.

“Yeah, I guess I am,” he said, clearing his throat.

“Am I making Trashmouth emotional?”

“No way,” he insisted. “I never get emotional and I definitely did not cry when we watched Moana the other night.”

“Yes, you did, Papa!”

“Shh!”

Bev laughed again and Richie grinned.

“Don’t worry, Ben cries at everything so your secret is safe with me,” she said. “I’m going to talk to him tonight about vacation days. You have to let us know when you’re free, though.”

“We’ll make it work, don’t worry.”

“Yeah, but I know Eddie’s always busy at work and you two are the ones with a kid.”

“We’ll make it work,” Richie repeated.

“I feel kinda bad though,” Bev admitted. “Won’t Lydia be overwhelmed by a welcome party filled with grown-ups?”

Richie blinked again. He hadn’t thought about that. He glanced at his

daughter, happily tracing her hand on a piece of pink paper and swallowed.

“She has some friends from her school,” he said slowly. “I can invite them for her.”

“I just don’t want her bored or frightened,” Bev continued. “I remember the few times my dad took me to see family, I was the only kid. I hated it. Everyone talking over you and then yelling if you dared to look bored.”

Richie swallowed again and looked down at the table. He had always hated it when Bev spoke of her father but he was smart enough to know to shut up and listen.

“Anyway,” she said brightly, “I just want her to have fun.”

“She will. We’ll make it fun.”

“And Ben and I already got her a bunch of presents.”

“Oh no,” he groaned. “We specifically said no presents.” Lydia’s head immediately shot up, eyes wide and bright. “She’s spoiled enough as it is.” Lydia shook her head fervently.

“And send us her size, I saw some super cute clothes the other day,” Bev continued.

“Bev, no—”

“Yes, Richie,” she insisted. “I love you but I’m ignoring you.”

“Bev, I swear—”

“I gotta go,” she said quickly. “I love you, Trashmouth.”

Richie sighed but smiled warmly.

“I love you, too,” he replied gently.

“And I love Lydia even without meeting her yet.”

Richie’s heart did something intense, and it knocked the breath out of

him.

“Richie?”

“Yeah, no, thanks, Bev,” he said quickly.

“Alright,” she said, laughter in her voice. “I’ll talk to you soon, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

Richie placed his phone on the table and tried to gather his thoughts. It was harder than usual.

“Look at this one, Papa,” Lydia announced, lifting another colorful and glittery drawing. A large percentage of said glitter slipped off and fell onto the table. “Oops.”

“That’s a beaut,” he said and sniffed. “My friend Bev said she loves you.”

“That’s nice,” Lydia replied. “And she bought me presents?”

“Yeah, but you don’t need anything.”

“But maybe she got me something I don’t have,” Lydia pointed out.

“Airtight logic, as usual, kiddo,” Richie admitted.

Lydia smiled and clapped her hands together in an attempt to clear them of glitter, frowning when it did nothing.

“I think we gotta hose you down,” Richie observed. He glanced at the clock. “And soon, before your dad walks in and has a conniption.”

“What’s a conniption?”

“It’s what happens when your dad comes home and sees what a mess your papa has made,” Richie answered, standing. “Come on, let’s get

you and all of this cleaned up.”

Richie finished loading the dishwasher, closed it, set it, and immediately sat down in the closest chair, suddenly exhausted. He barely flinched when he felt arms curl around his shoulders and a chin rest on the top of his head.

“You okay, buddy?” Bev asked gently.

“Yeah, just tired,” he replied. “Too much excitement for one day.”

Bev nodded and leaned down to place a kiss on his head.

“You sure you’re good?” she asked again.

“Yeah, but just...can you do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Can you tell me if my hair is thinning up there?”

Bev laughed and flicked his ear.

“No, it’s as thick and messy as ever,” she replied. “But you do still have a fivehead.”

“Shut up.”

Bev squeezed his shoulders and then sat in the empty chair closest to him. A golden glow from the setting sun streamed through the open windows, and they could hear the rest of the party—Losers catching up and laughing and children shrieking with delight at whatever delighted five-year-olds—but it was mercifully quiet in the kitchen.

“I’m glad you invited her friends,” Bev said. “She needed some people her age to counterbalance all of us boring grown-ups.”

Richie nodded.

“Yeah, but she had fun with you and Ben earlier,” he said. “I guess she’s used to being the only kid around with just me and Eddie.”

“Do you think you guys will adopt again?”

Richie swallowed and shrugged.

“I don’t know, I mean, we’re still getting the hang of having just one kid,” he sighed. “But I wouldn’t want her to be an only child. They’re kinda weird, no offense.”

Bev laughed.

“They’re also lonely,” she pointed out, “so I wouldn’t recommend it for her, either.”

Richie felt compelled to hug her but settled for taking one of her hands in both of his, resting them on the table. They were both silent for a long moment, and he tried to ignore the fact that Bev was gazing at him expectantly before he cleared his throat.

“Bev, I...I’m scared.”

She quirked her head to the side and gazed at Richie with mild confusion on her face.

“Scared of what, Rich?”

“Fucking everything,” he admitted, not meeting her eyes. “What if I’m in over my head?”

Bev squeezed his hands.

“I’m not a parent,” she offered gently, “but I think that’s a common side effect.”

Richie sighed and shook his head.

“And you’re not doing this alone,” Bev continued, reaching out with her free hand to brush a strand of hair behind his ear. “You’ve got Eddie. The two of you are doing a great job. You can tell just by looking at Lydia.”

Richie’s chest tightened.

“Lydia’s amazing,” he admitted. “But she was amazing when we adopted her.”

“Rich—”

“And Eddie...” he swallowed and looked up at Bev, “I’m scared I forced him into something he didn’t want.”

Bev appeared genuinely shocked.

“Richie, that’s impossible,” she insisted.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think for even one second Eddie would move across the country and endure years of all that bureaucratic bullshit and constant, needling, in-depth assessments from social workers for something he didn’t want?”

Richie swallowed and looked down again.

“He loves you,” Bev said gently, leaning in closer to her friend, “but he doesn’t love you that much.”

That startled a laugh out of Richie. He wiped at his nose and sniffed. Bev used her free hand to wipe at his face.

“You’re just tired,” she observed. “Tired and overwhelmed at having all of us here and showing off Lydia.”

“Hey, do you guys have any...what’s going on?”

They both looked up. Ben was standing in the doorway looking not unlike a deer caught in the headlights.

“Nothing, nothing,” Bev said quickly.

“Yeah, nothing, just your girlfriend bullying me about my forehead, that’s all,” Richie replied. Ben smiled but he still looked unconvinced. Richie continued, “You need something, dude?”

“Oh, yeah, just wanted to grab a drink,” Ben said.

Richie motioned towards the fridge and Ben opened it, reached in, and pulled out a juicebox. He glanced down at it in his hand and then smirked at Richie, his eyebrows raised.

“Hey, don’t knock it, mix that with a little vodka, fucking delicious,” Richie insisted. “That’s how I get through Lydia’s gymnastics classes.”

Bev smirked and slapped him lightly on the knee, earning a yelp from Richie. Ben shook his head, still smiling, closed the fridge door, and immediately pushed the straw through the top of the juicebox and sipped.

“Hmm,” he said after a few moments’ consideration, “not bad, actually.”

“See?” Richie replied. “There are some benefits to having a kid.” Ben sat at the table beside him and affectionately patted him on the shoulder. Richie glanced at him and bit the bullet. “So, not to sound totally straight, but are you guys thinking about having kids?”

Ben’s eyes widened and his lips tightened around the straw. Bev rolled her eyes.

“We don’t know, Rich,” she said gently. “Though we are running out of time.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m well over forty.”

“We’re all well over forty.”

Bev gave him a pointed look and realization washed over Richie’s face.

“Oh, yeah,” Richie muttered. “Who gives a shit? I read about a woman in India who had a baby at seventy.”

“I don’t plan on going for that,” Bev laughed.

“Besides, you and Eddie have inspired us to at least look into adoption,” Ben replied.

“Oh yeah?” Richie said. “Nice. Well, if you need advice, talk to Eddie. I’m a mess.”

“Richie...”

“I’m serious,” he insisted. “I know we only got approval because of him.”

“Come on, that’s not—”

“It is true. I mean, who would you let raise a kid? A shitty and foul-mouthed comic with crazy hours and a drinking problem he only just got under control or the responsible, completely organized nerd in polo shirts?”

Ben and Bev were both silent and Richie realized he had, once again, gone too far. He racked his mind to rectify the situation—a joke, an impression, a scream, anything—when he was saved by the backdoor opening and Eddie appearing in the doorway.

“Hey, Lydia’s friends are getting picked up,” he said. “You wanna come say goodbye with me?”

Richie stood.

“Sorry, folks, parenting duty calls,” he said casually and offered a lop-sided grin before leaving Ben and Bev in the kitchen.

He’s late.

What time is it by you?

7:32.

Well, didn’t he say he had a dinner meeting?

Yeah, at 5. wtf

I’m sure he’s just sitting in traffic. He’ll be home soon. Don’t worry.

I’m not worried. I’m fucking pissed.

He can't help it if work is crazy, sweetheart.

He could've called out. I'm by myself over here, neck deep in snotty tissues and crying kids.

Richie glanced up from his phone at the sound of keys in the front door. Fucking finally, he thought. The door opened and closed and it seemed to Richie that Eddie purposely took a long time to get from the foyer to the living room, where he was sitting on the couch with Lydia's feet in his lap and their youngest curled up against his side, drooling onto his shirt. They were still passed out, mercifully.

Eddie walked into the living room and quietly stepped up to the couch.

"Hey," he whispered. "How are the girls?"

"Lydia's fever broke," Richie sighed, "but I think it's going into her chest. She keeps coughing. And Tess is just congested and keeps puking up the medicine so that's been fun."

"She hasn't kept any of the medicine down?"

Richie shook his head and shoved his fingers beneath his glasses, rubbing his eyes tiredly.

"Fuck, we gotta get her to take it," Eddie said.

"No shit," Richie snapped. He tensed when Lydia stretched in her sleep but she remained asleep.

"I read about another brand online today," Eddie said, leaning down to run his fingers through Tess's dark hair. "Supposedly it doesn't have any of that artificial flavoring shit. That's probably what's making her sick."

Richie shrugged, too exhausted to even comment. Eddie glanced at him, raising an eyebrow before continuing, "I'll pick some up on the way home tomorrow."

Richie's head shot up and he stared at Eddie, stunned.

"You're going into work tomorrow?" he asked dumbly.

"I gotta, but just for half a day. I'll be home early."

"Like you were today?"

Eddie straightened and shook his head.

"I'm too tired for this right now," he sighed.

Richie's eyes widened. For a moment, he couldn't see straight.

"*You're* too tired?" he repeated, his voice strained.

Lydia moved again, sighing in her sleep before being rattled awake by a violent cough. Richie and Eddie both reached for the glass of water on the coffee table, but Lydia got to it first before immediately gulping down half of it.

"Easy, kiddo," Eddie murmured, taking the glass from her when was done. "How are you feeling?"

Lydia answered by coughing again, covering her mouth with her arm like her dad had showed her. Tears sprang to her eyes and her nose began running. Richie handed her the tissue box and ran his fingers through her unruly curls.

"My throat won't stop tickling," she finally gasped out.

"Your sinuses are draining, that's probably it," Eddie said before reaching towards his briefcase he had left on the floor. He opened it and brought out a bag of cough drops. "I made sure to get the lemon ones." He unwrapped and handed her one, and she immediately popped it in her mouth before settling back down on the couch.

Richie glanced over at Tess. She hadn't even stirred from the commotion. He was also quite sure some of the drool on his shirt was snot, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

"Look, you're home now, I'm gonna go take a shower, okay?" he said, gently moving Lydia's feet off his lap and placing a pillow beside Tess. Without waiting for an answer, he hurried to the bedroom,

leaving Eddie staring after his retreating back.

Richie, admittedly, took a particularly long shower but he felt he deserved it. A full day and a half of battling germs, miserable kids, and the occasional pukefest could wear a man out. Eddie's extra-early alarm this morning certainly didn't help, nor did his apparent reluctance to pick up the phone. Richie allowed himself one bang against the shower wall with his fist before concentrating on his breathing and allowing the warm water to undo the tension in his body. Fuck, he was tired.

Turning off the shower, he gingerly stepped out and wrapped a towel around his waist before heading into the bedroom, where Eddie was waiting for him.

"You talk to Bev about what a shitty husband I am?" he said in an oddly calm voice.

Richie blinked. Then he noticed his cell phone in Eddie's hand. Shit. Deflect, Tozier.

"You went through my phone?" he shot back. "And you left the girls alone?"

"Tess is still asleep and Lydia is watching TV," Eddie answered and took a step towards Richie. "And your phone went off with a text from Bev that had my name in it. Of course I fucking looked, you'd do the same."

Richie frowned. Eddie, was usual, was right.

"Bev and I talk all the time," he said, brushing past him to their bureau and began searching for pajamas. "You know that."

"Yeah, but—"

"And you talk to her and the guys," Richie continued. "What's the fucking difference?"

"I don't bitch and moan about you to them."

"Bullshit."

“I don’t share private things with them.”

Richie whirled around, which was a bit difficult considering he was still stepping into his pajama pants. “Private things?” he repeated. “You being late on a day where I really fucking needed you isn’t exactly intimate information. What’s the big deal?”

Eddie swallowed and shook his head.

“Well, I don’t like it,” he admitted.

Richie huffed a laugh.

“I don’t like that you care more about work than your family but we all got our crosses to bear, right?” he snapped. “So forgive me for letting off a little steam to someone who actually cares.”

Eddie stared at him, his eyes wide and impossibly bright. Richie looked away, grabbed the first t-shirt he could find in the bureau and put it on.

“I’m gonna go sit with the kids,” he muttered. “Text Bev back for me and tell her everything’s fucking fine.”

He felt Eddie’s eyes on him as he stalked out of the bedroom and tried his best to school his face when he approached the couch but by the sidelong glance his daughter gave him, he knew he had done a poor job of it.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading!

3. Tess

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie discover the challenges of increasing their family of three to four.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

Eddie walked through the front door, locked it behind him, and shrugged out of his jacket. He could hear Richie's obnoxious laughter from the living room and music that sounded vaguely familiar. Placing his briefcase down on the ground, he followed the sounds and walked into Richie and Lydia both lounging on the couch. Eddie glanced at the TV.

"Wayne's World?" he said, raising his eyebrows at Richie.

"Hi, Daddy," Lydia exclaimed, turning and standing on the couch to give Eddie a hug. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her on the top of her head.

"It's a classic, babe," Richie said. He looked up and pursed his lips in an exaggerated manner. Eddie leaned down to quickly kiss him.

"But it's not exactly age appropriate, is it?" he asked, motioning towards Lydia who had turned back to the TV.

"It's on cable, edited," Richie explained. "You eat anything? We got some leftovers in the fridge."

"I grabbed a sandwich before I left," he muttered. He walked around the couch to tiredly collapse beside Lydia. Yawning, he tried to watch the movie but found his mind wandering. He briefly considered heading in for a shower and then bed but resisted. It wasn't often that he got to watch a movie with his family and he was determined to enjoy it—though he had never quite understood the appeal of Wayne's World. Maybe it was because he never got into metal but still, it was worth it to just hear Richie's ridiculous laugh.

Soon enough, Eddie's eyes grew heavy and he felt himself falling towards sleep when he was jerked awake by a kick to his side. He glanced down; Lydia had stretched out, her feet in his side and her head in Richie's lap. She was fast asleep.

"Lemme put her to bed," he murmured.

"Hang on, it's almost over," Richie insisted.

"Rich..."

"She's asleep anyway. There's only like fifteen minutes left, I'll help."

Eddie sighed and remained seated, waiting for the movie (which he suspected Richie had seen a few dozen times) to finish. He closed his eyes and suddenly, he was in his childhood home, trapped in the living room he had so hated, forced to sit still by his mother as she had the TV switched onto whatever she wanted to watch. It was stifling, the air thick with tension that his mother was seemingly oblivious to, and all Eddie wanted was to run out of the house and never look back. But he wasn't foolish—he had nowhere to go and no one but his mother.

Eddie gasped for breath, his eyes flying open and his heart pumping wildly. He swallowed and looked down, suddenly overwhelmed with the need to gather his daughter into his arms and yet, he resisted for fear of smothering her.

"Eds, you alright?" Richie asked, concerned.

“Yes,” Eddie gasped. “I just...need to shower and clear my mind.”

“Okay,” Richie said slowly. “You sure?”

“Yeah,” Eddie insisted and carefully stood to hurry to their bedroom.

He stepped out of the bathroom, steam curling behind him. He ran a hand through his wet hair and straightened, determined to face this as bravely as he could. He looked up at Richie lounging on the bed, his phone in his hand.

“Hey,” Eddie said, clearing his throat, “can we talk?”

Richie looked up at him, eyebrows raised and Eddie inwardly winced. Fuck, he wish he was better with words.

“I don’t want Lydia to be an only child,” he said quickly, the words rushing out of his mouth.

Richie stared at him, his eyes wide and his mouth slightly agape. Then he threw his head back and laughed. Eddie scowled.

“Shut the fuck up,” he said. “You’re gonna wake up Lydia.”

“Jesus, Eddie,” Richie gasped, calming down ever so slightly, “I thought you were about to drop a fucking bombshell. Don’t scare me like that.”

“Sorry,” he muttered before heading towards the bed and sitting down.

“It’s fine,” Richie said, wiping at his eyes and grinning. “But I do think we need to talk about this.”

“Yeah.” Eddie ran a hand through his hair again. “So, um, what do you think?”

Richie raised his eyebrows again and sat up.

“Well, this did kinda come out of nowhere,” he said. “What made you

think of this anyway?”

Eddie looked down at his lap, where his hands were clasped tightly. He separated them and stretched his fingers.

“I...” he began, searching for the words. “I just...I don’t want her to be alone.”

“She’s got us, Eds,” Richie said gently.

“It’s not the same,” he insisted, meeting Richie’s eyes. “You had your sisters growing up and I know you didn’t always get along but at least you had someone on your side at home.”

“I guess so.”

“And now you guys have each other for when things get tough,” Eddie continued, his voice growing more and more strained. “I had no one.”

“Eds—”

“I mean, I had you and the rest of the Losers but it’s not the same thing. It fucking sucks going home to an empty house with just an adult waiting for you. And then when she died...fuck, I had to deal with that on my own.”

Eddie started a bit when he felt Richie’s lips against his temple.

“This isn’t just about Lydia, is it?” he whispered along his hair.

Eddie hunched his shoulders and shook his head.

“I know, I know, I’m projecting,” he muttered. “Fuck, I’m just like her.”

“Who?” Richie asked, sharply. When Eddie didn’t respond, he quickly wrapped an arm around Eddie’s shoulder and insisted, “If you’re about to say that you’re like your mom, I swear to God, Eds.”

“It’s true though.”

"It's not," Richie said firmly. "Eddie, you're an incredible father and you love Lydia. And she loves you."

Eddie took a deep breath and clenched his eyes shut.

"But she's still alone," he whispered. "And I want her to have someone. A sibling."

"Okay," Richie said after a few moments. "I get it. And I feel the same way for the most part. But having two kids is a hell of a lot different than just one. I mean, we have a lot of figuring out to do."

"I know," Eddie said. "It's a lot. And I don't expect it to be easy."

"No, but we're a solid team."

Eddie nodded.

"And we have to talk to Lydia," he said. "She may not want this."

Richie gathered Eddie into his arms.

"You're a good dad," he whispered against his hair. "And we can figure this out. I know we can."

Eddie leaned into Richie's embrace, exhaled a shaking breath, and smiled.

Going from one child to two did come with a great deal of changes. For one thing, Richie decided to cut back drastically on his career—he stopped touring, settling on doing shows only in the tristate area, and only on nights when Eddie could stay home all day with the kids.

When the Losers heard this, they were shocked and assumed, among themselves, that Richie wouldn't last more than a couple months as a house husband. They were sort of right. It was only six weeks before Eddie declared that, in order to preserve the sanity in their house, Richie had to have a creative outlet that went beyond simply trying to make his daughters laugh. So, with the help of his agent, Richie became the very thing he had resented in his career: a comedy writer.

He wrote material for several different comics, a couple of whom were LGBTQ+, and actually, found it kind of enjoyable. Not having to perform it meant there was less pressure and it was even oddly freeing. He could say whatever he wanted and it didn't matter; no one knew it was him. When the Losers worried that this wouldn't be enough, Richie waved them off. The draw to performing live just wasn't there anymore. Besides, he had a much better audience at home (and one that was more in line with his own emotional maturity, Eddie had remarked, which had gotten quite a laugh from everyone).

But Richie cutting back on his career meant someone had to support the family, so Eddie found himself working harder. The long days were difficult but Eddie was good at his job and he took pride in being able to provide for his family. Besides, coming home to Richie and the girls made it all really fucking worth it.

And one of the most unexpected changes in adopting a second child was how suddenly the previous dynamics switched. When they adopted Tess, only three years old and terribly shy, Eddie had assumed that Richie would immediately ingratiate himself with their new daughter and become the favorite. Instead, Tess had taken one look at her fathers and all but latched herself to Eddie.

She followed him around the house, cried hysterically when he went out of her sight, gripped his legs to prevent him from leaving, and only allowed him to read her bedtime stories. It touched his heart, but mostly Eddie just found it amusing—especially when her overt favoritism seemed to really confound Richie.

“I don't get it,” he complained. “I'm the fun one.”

Mike and Ben laughed while Bev rubbed his back in sympathy. The Losers were in their dining room, picking at a half-eaten cheesecake and drinking copious amounts of coffee and tea. They had stopped at Richie and Eddie's house en route to New York City to celebrate the launch of Bill's latest bestseller (and for Ben and Bev to look at some townhouses) but first had to meet the latest Loser.

Lydia had delighted in being the center of attention once again but Tess had immediately reached her arms up to Eddie (who naturally

picked her up) and hid her face in his chest, refusing to acknowledge any one other than her Daddy. The Losers weren't offended.

But now the girls had been put to bed, and it was time for the grown-ups to relax and catch up. Or, simply complain about how unfair it was to no longer be the favorite, in Richie's case.

"It's just a phase," Bev insisted.

"Or maybe she just isn't a fan of your comedy," Bill offered.

"I knew she was the smart one of the family," Eddie replied.

Richie flipped him off and stabbed at the cheesecake with his fork.

"Well, I don't know why she wants you to do the bedtime stories," he remarked. "You can't do the voices."

"What voices?" Mike asked.

"You know, the different voices for everyone," Richie explained, waving his hand. "The Lorax has a different voice than the Wild Things and whatnot. Eddie reads bedtime stories like he's presenting at a fucking business meeting."

Eddie rolled his eyes as the others laughed.

"Why can't you just let Eddie have this?" Ben asked, grinning. "What's the big deal?"

"Because Richie doesn't want to be just a dad," Eddie said, shaking his head. "He wants to be a cool dad."

More laughter, until Ben and Mike had to admit they didn't get the joke, which immediately launched into Richie explaining the entire plot of *Mean Girls* in excruciatingly minute detail. Eddie only managed to stop him by shoveling a fork full of cheesecake in his husband's mouth, much to the Losers' relief.

When they left for their hotel, each of the Losers congratulated Richie and Eddie on their latest foray into parenthood. Bev embraced both of them and told them how happy she was that they were both so

happy. Richie told her to stop being embarrassing and Eddie merely looked away, blinking rapidly.

“I don’t like that you care more about work than your family but we all got our crosses to bear, right?” Richie snapped. “So forgive me for letting off a little steam to someone who actually cares.”

Eddie stared at him, his eyes wide and sinking feeling in chest. Richie looked away, grabbed the first t-shirt he could find in the bureau and put it on.

“I’m gonna go sit with the kids,” he muttered. “Text Bev back for me and tell her everything’s fucking fine.”

Eddie watched him stalk out of the bedroom, too stunned to attempt to stop him. How long he stood there, gaping at nothing, he had no idea. Then the phone in his hand pinged. He blinked and glanced down at it. Another text from Bev. He opened it.

Let me know when he gets home. Now you’ve got me worried.

Eddie sighed and tapped in a reply. He didn’t want to leave Bev hanging.

He’s home now. Thanks.

He threw the phone on the bed and went into the bathroom, determined to shower and clear his mind before he did something he regretted. Later, clean but drained, he walked quietly down the hallway and saw Richie carrying Tess into the kitchen.

“Come on, kiddo, you gotta try to get some medicine down,” he said, his voice tinged with exhaustion.

“No, no, no,” Tess wailed. “I hate it.”

“I know, sweetheart, but if you don’t, you could get sicker and then end up in the hospital or something.”

Eddie hurried into the kitchen and stopped short at the sight of Tess

sitting on the table, tears streaming down her face and struggling to breathe through her congestion. The moment her eyes met his, she began to cry

in earnest and reached her arms towards him. Richie turned from taking the medicine bottle out of the refrigerator. He said nothing, though Eddie noticed his lips tighten.

"It's okay, sweetheart," Eddie murmured, gathering Tess into his arms. He sat down, arranging her on his lap. "Everything's okay. I know you're not feeling good right now but I need you to do me a favor."

Tess hiccuped and wiped at her eyes before nodding slowly.

"I need you to try to take some of this medicine. I know it's yucky but you gotta try. I can show you a trick though," he continued. "If you keep your nose closed, you won't taste it. I promise." He turned towards Richie. "Can you get a juicebox out?"

Richie did so, stabbing the straw through the top with a little more force than necessary. He handed it to Eddie, who held it ready.

"Listen, we're gonna do this quick, okay?" Eddie continued. "You're gonna take that medicine and then drink this juice down. And you won't taste it for long."

"Promise?" Tess asked, her voice thick with tears.

"I promise," Eddie insisted. "Then you can brush your teeth and go to bed feeling better."

Richie crouched in front of them, holding the plastic spoon filled with thick, frankly disgusting looking medicine in his hand.

"Close your nose, sweetheart," Eddie repeated. Tess hesitated briefly before squeezing her nose tightly between two fingers and opened her mouth. Richie quickly fed her the medicine and, before she even had a chance to fully swallow, Eddie brought the straw to her lips. She drank the juice deeply but immediately opened her mouth and began sobbing again.

"Good job, you did it," Eddie said, tightening his arms around her.

"You did it, kiddo, all done," Richie said, standing. He ran a hand through her hair and leaned down to kiss her on the forehead. She immediately turned and hid her face in Eddie's chest, crying. Richie's eyes briefly met Eddie, before he turned away and dropped the spoon in the sink.

"I'm going to put Lydia to bed," he said and disappeared.

Eddie sighed before brushing his lips along the top of Tess's head.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?" he whispered.

"It was awful!" she wailed.

"I know," he said, standing up with her in his arms. "Being sick is no fun. Tomorrow I'm going to get you something else to help you feel better that won't taste so bad, okay? And if you take it, we can relax at home and watch movies."

Tess wiped at her eyes and running nose. Eddie smiled, and briefly wondered how he had managed to get to this point in his life where the sight of someone else's mucus didn't really bother him. Tess smiled, too.

"Okay," she said before laying her head on his shoulder. "Can we watch *Wizard of Oz*?"

"We can watch whatever you want," he promised, carrying her into her bedroom. He passed the open door to Lydia's room and quickly glanced in. Richie was laying beside her on the bed, quietly reading *A Wrinkle in Time* aloud. He made no notice of Eddie and Lydia, too enraptured with the story, did not either. Eddie continued on.

Eddie yawned and rubbed at his face as he stood in front of the coffee maker. The sun was just beginning to peek through the kitchen windows. With luck (and the drowsy side effects of their medicine), the girls wouldn't be up for at least a couple of hours.

"What are you doing here?"

Eddie glanced over his shoulder. Richie was staring at him from the doorway, looking completely disheveled, with hair standing at all angles and his glasses askew. Eddie had to admit to himself, he looked cute, if not nearly dead on his feet.

“I’m making coffee, what does it look like?” Eddie replied.

“What about work?”

“I took a sick day,” Eddie answered and, taking out two mugs, poured coffee for the both of them.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Richie shake his head in disbelief. Eddie ignored it, refusing to rise to the bait. He handed Richie his coffee before taking out the milk and sugar and placing them on the table.

“How was Lydia?” he asked nonchalantly.

“Once she got the cough medicine down, she passed out,” Richie sighed. “She avoided it the first couple hours.”

“It’s that fucking artificial flavoring—”

“Yeah, I know, you said it last night.”

The quiet anger that had been simmering in his belly since the night before started to boil inside Eddie. He briefly considered leaving the kitchen but knew, rationally, that would solve nothing. He cleared his throat.

“Can you do me a favor?” he asked. Richie glanced at him, a wary look on his face as he nodded slowly. “Don’t ever tell one of our daughters they’re going to have to go to the hospital again.”

Richie blinked.

“What?” he asked, a blank look on his face.

“Last night,” Eddie continued, “you told Tess if she didn’t take her medicine, she’d get sicker and end up in the hospital.”

Richie rolled his eyes.

“I was just trying to get her to listen and take the damn medicine,” he insisted. “I didn’t mean it.”

“But she didn’t know that,” Eddie shot back. “Don’t threaten them with the hospital.”

“That wasn’t a fucking threat. Jesus, Eddie, what do take me for?”

“Just don’t, from now on, okay?”

“It’s not like I’m your fucking mother,” Richie continued. “You’ve act enough like her for the both of us.”

The two men stared at one another, a tense silence enveloping them both. For several moments, neither said a thing, as if daring the other to make the first move. But Eddie had always been the brave one.

“Are we really going to do this right now?” he asked hoarsely.

“Do what?” Richie asked, his shoulders sagging.

“Act like assholes just because our kids are sick.”

“It’s not because of the kids,” Richie asserted and hid his face in his hands. “Fuck, Eddie.”

“Then what it is? Fucking tell me so we can move on.”

“I told you last night,” Richie said, raising his head. His wide eyes had a desperate look to them.

“I work too much,” Eddie answered. “Is that it?”

Richie sighed and shook his head.

“I just...Eddie, work can’t be the priority.”

“And how are we supposed to live?” Eddie asked. Richie opened his mouth several times before closing it finally. “You don’t think I’d love to be home with the kids more? But someone has to support us.”

Richie paled rapidly and Eddie noticed that his hands resting on the

table curled into fists.

“Don’t fucking do that,” Richie hissed. Eddie swallowed. He had never heard that tone of voice from his husband. “I gave up everything for us. I gave up my career, my life in LA, my fucking sanity for our family because I knew one of us had to be here to raise our kids. Don’t act like I’m just a fucking freeloader hanging out at home in my fucking pajamas all day.”

“I’m not saying that, Rich,” Eddie insisted, the urge to reach out and take his hand almost overwhelming him. “I know you work hard here at home.”

“I do it because you won’t. Or can’t. Either way, it’s on me.”

Something sharp pierced through Eddie’s heart, and he resisted the urge to rest his hand on the scar on his chest. For a moment, Richie looked abashed before swallowing and sitting back in his chair, his arms crossed over his chest.

Eddie nodded once.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “You’re right, Richie.”

“Eds, I—”

“No, you’re absolutely right. I can’t do what you do,” he admitted, looking down at his half-drunk coffee. “I’m not the same sort of father that you are. I get it.”

“Eddie, don’t—”

“Shh, quiet.”

They both fell silent. From Tess’s room came a plaintive, “Daddy, Papa.”

“She’s gonna wake up her sister,” Eddie grumbled before standing and leaving Richie stunned and alone in the kitchen.

Eddie sat on the bed and yawned, grateful to finally be in his bedroom after another long day of sneezing and coughing children. The new medicine he had purchased seemed to be doing the trick, however, along with several hours of sitting on the couch watching movies so he was certain the girls would be on the mend by tomorrow. God, he never wanted to see a wadded up, used tissue again.

Richie walked in and headed straight for the bureau, searching for fresh pajamas. Once satisfied, he reached for the bedroom door.

"Where are you going?" Eddie asked tiredly.

Richie stopped short and tensed up ever so slightly.

"Back to Lydia's room," he said.

Eddie rolled his eyes and ran a hand down his face.

"Enough, Richie, just sleep here tonight."

"But—"

"I'm too fucking exhausted to fight with you anymore," Eddie admitted. "So just come here."

Richie turned and stared at him, looking like he'd rather be anywhere but in their bedroom at the moment. Eddie frowned.

"Look, we both fucked up," he sighed. "And we both know Lydia could tell we were in a fight all day so let's figure this out before she thinks we're getting a divorce or something."

Richie's entire body seemed to slump downwards. He looked incredibly drained and Eddie's heart went out to him. He took a tentative step towards Eddie and sighed.

"I shouldn't have said that shit about you as a dad," he admitted softly. "I was angry and tired and that's not a fucking excuse but...I'm sorry."

Eddie swallowed and nodded.

“And I know you weren’t threatening Tess last night,” he said. “I just...freaked out and remembered my mom pulling that shit and I guess I just...overreacted.”

Richie blinked rapidly and sniffed.

“You’re not your mom, Eds.”

“I know, you always say that.”

“Because it’s fucking true.” Richie took two long steps and sat beside Eddie on the bed, taking his hand in his. “I was being an asshole.”

“So was I. And I get it,” Eddie continued. “I know I work too much and I know you get overwhelmed with having the kids all day.”

“I signed up for it though,” Richie muttered.

“Doesn’t mean I can’t help out more,” Eddie replied. “And I do fucking hate how much I work. It’s just...” he sighed, searching for the right words. He felt Richie’s eyes on him and he took a deep breath. “It’s just...it’s the only thing I’m good at.”

Richie raised his eyebrows, his mouth falling open.

“What the fuck,” he said. “What the fuck are you talking about, Eds?”

“I have one thing that I was always successful at, one thing to be proud of, and it’s my ability to do my job,” Eddie continued, the words now spilling out of him. “I mean, of course I’m proud of our kids but I constantly think I’m screwing up. At work, I don’t have that. And it’s totally selfish of me, I know, but—”

“Eddie, Eddie, shut up.”

Eddie did. Richie took his face in his hands and gazed directly into his eyes.

“You are a fucking idiot, Edward Tozier,” he said firmly and slowly. Eddie couldn’t help it; he laughed. “I’m fucking serious here. You are not your job. That is not the only thing you are good at. You’re funny, and loving, and smarter than anyone else I know, and you’re

fucking dedicated to the people you love. And you always know how to get the kids to calm down and how to talk me off the ledge and without you, this family would be incomplete. I love you. Our girls love you. And I'm sorry you're married to such an asshole but you did say yes so that's on you." Eddie blinked and realized he had tears in his eyes. "Yes, you're really good at your job and I do think it's totally sexy that you're the steadfast, manly provider for our family." Eddie rolled his eyes. "I just don't want you regretting how much you're working later, you know? We just gotta...find a balance. And not be dicks about it."

"That's gonna be tough for you," Eddie replied, sniffing. Richie smiled and his face brightened when Eddie leaned in to kiss him deeply.

"Fuck, I've missed you," Richie sighed against his lips.

"Me too," Eddie whispered. "The next time we fight, we should just immediately make out."

"The kids will get grossed out," Richie observed. "But I guess they deserve it after all the puke and snot they just put us through."

Eddie laughed and pushed Richie down on the bed.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading!

4. Family

Summary for the Chapter:

A trip to visit the extended Tozier family reveals mixed emotions for Richie and Eddie.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

"So why can't you sit with us?" Eddie asked for what seemed like the 500th time.

"Dude, I told you, I'm her sponsor," Richie explained for what seemed like the 500th time.

"Sounds like AA," Eddie grumbled.

"Well, I'm prepared to do that, too, but hopefully not yet. She's only fourteen, after all."

"What's AA?" Tess asked from the backseat.

"Nothing."

"It's for alcoholics," Lydia explained. At Tess's confused face, she clarified, "People who drink too much."

"Oh," Tess said sagely. "Is Fiona an alcoholic?"

"Your cousin isn't an alcoholic," Eddie sighed. "She's just Catholic."

Richie laughed. Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose and briefly closed his eyes, trying to steady his nerves.

"So you can't sit with us at all during this thing?" he asked.

"No," Richie repeated. "What's the big deal, it's only like an hour. And you'll be sitting with my family." Richie saw Eddie grimace out of the corner of his eye. "Oh, come on, they're not that bad. Besides, they all love you."

"That's an exaggeration."

"Can we sit next to Eric and Molly, Papa?"

"Sure, you can sit with whoever you want." Richie glanced in the rearview mirror. "You guys excited to see Grandma and Grandpa and all your cousins?"

"Yes," Tess dutifully answered.

"Everyone except Kevin," Lydia said, "he's a jerk."

"Hey, what did we say about name-calling?" Eddie said, turning in his seat to look at his daughters.

Lydia crossed her arms over her chest and said nothing. Tess merely shrugged. Eddie sighed and turned his gaze back to the front windshield.

"Just don't call him that in front of your aunt and uncle, okay?" Richie said. "Besides, he can't help being a jerk. He's a sixteen year old boy, they're all jerks."

"They are?" Tess asked.

"Yeah, they can't help it."

"Were you a jerk when you were sixteen?"

"Oh, definitely," Richie replied.

“And Daddy?” Tess continued.

“He was king of the jerks.”

Eddie shot a withering look at his husband before turning back to his phone, which he was tapping repeatedly.

“Why’d Fiona pick you to be her sponsor?” he asked.

“Because I’m her favorite uncle,” Richie replied, shrugging. “Why?”

“Because I’m looking up what the duties of a confirmation sponsor are and you are definitely not qualified, Richard Tozier,” Eddie stated.

Richie laughed so hard Eddie immediately reached for the steering wheel, just in case.

“What am I supposed to do?” he asked. “I don’t remember from my confirmation.”

“You’re supposed to be an active Catholic, living ‘a life of faith,’” Eddie read, using air quotes liberally. “Also you’re supposed to ‘encourage participation in the life of the Church.’”

“I encourage all my nieces and nephews.”

“Not in Catholicism,” Eddie pointed out.

“To-may-to, to-mah-to,” Richie replied. “Minor details.”

“Are we almost there?” Tess asked.

“Yeah, about ten minutes from the church,” Richie said, to which Eddie groaned. “Don’t overreact.”

“Churches just make me uncomfortable,” Eddie muttered. “I feel like everyone’s looking at me and judging me.”

“Well, they’re definitely judging you but that’s because they’re judging everyone,” Richie replied. He reached over and patted Eddie’s knee. “Don’t worry. One hour and then it’s back to my sister’s

house for food and alcohol.”

Eddie sighed again.

“At least I have your dad to commiserate with,” he muttered.

“Exactly, old Went is about as Catholic as you are straight,” Richie said, grinning.

“So why does he put up with all this?”

“For my mom,” Richie replied. At Eddie’s dubious look, he continued, “It’s called love, Eds. You gotta compromise sometimes.”

“Yeah, Dad, compromise,” Lydia echoed.

Eddie rolled his eyes and leaned his head against the window in defeat.

Richie did feel a bit guilty leaving his husband to fend for himself with his family but he had to go sit with the other sponsors. It was the rule. And though he was extremely familiar with breaking Catholic rules, he didn’t want to cause a scene for his niece. Besides, he was able to glance back over his shoulder and catch Eddie’s eye—until the old lady behind him raised an eyebrow at him and he turned around dutifully, facing the altar.

He tried to pay attention to the ceremony but, just like at his confirmation, his mind wandered. At one point, he managed to catch sight of Fiona in the crowd of fourteen year olds in billowing, ridiculous robes—she was easy to spot with her dyed electric blue hair. She grinned and waved at her uncle and Richie felt his heart squeeze with affection. He loved all of his sister’s kids but he had a soft spot for her. Had they met back in 1989, she would’ve definitely been welcomed into the Losers Club.

A chill went through him at the thought. Like with his own children, Richie wanted to protect his niece, and prevent her from ever realizing how dark and dangerous the world could be.

He suddenly realized his heart was beating faster and a cold sweat had broken out on his forehead.

Relax, he said to himself, It's gone and can't hurt anyone anymore. She's safe. Your girls are safe. You and Eddie are safe.

He ignored the disdainful look of the old lady behind him and turned in his seat. Eddie was too busy trying to hush Tess and her cousin Molly to notice. Richie exhaled shakily and turned back around, blinking hard. It was almost over, he just had to get through the worst of it. He took a deep breath.

Look, he loved his niece, he would do anything for her, and when she had asked him to be her confirmation sponsor, he had agreed without even hesitating but, as he stood and walked her up to the altar with his hand on her shoulder as she received the blessing from the bishop, Richie was terrified.

All the guilt, anger, and self-doubt that he had felt as a young boy came flooding back as he stared up at the crucifix and shuddered. He had not invited any of the Losers to his confirmation. He had never mentioned it at all, never brought up being raised in the Catholic Church because they wouldn't understand it. Hell, he didn't understand it. He just went through the motions because it pleased his mother and sometimes, after all the insanity with clown, he wanted so desperately to believe that there was something else out there. Something to help him make sense of this fucked up, unforgiving world.

The bishop stopped speaking and Fiona began moving. She glanced at him as Richie remained standing still. He blinked and tried to smile but he doubted he did a good job of it. He squeezed her shoulder and walked her back to her pew before returning to his. It was over. He collapsed in his seat and tried to breathe.

"Thank God that's over," Eddie said as he climbed into the passenger seat.

"It wasn't so bad," Lydia offered, buckling up.

“It was boring,” Tess replied.

Richie said nothing as he gripped the steering wheel.

“Rich?” Eddie asked. “You okay?”

Richie blinked.

“Huh? Yeah, I’m fine. What?”

“You know you have to turn the car on to get to your sister’s, right?”
Eddie asked, raising an eyebrow.

Richie shook his head to clear it.

“Yeah, yeah, just, there’s always traffic getting out of a church parking lot,” he said lamely, switching on the car.

“You want me to drive?” Eddie offered.

“No, I’m fine. The house is less than fifteen minutes away, no big deal.”

“Okay,” Eddie said slowly, clearly not believing him.

Richie frowned and shifted the car into gear.

“You did a good job up there, Papa,” Lydia said brightly. “I saw you with Fiona.”

“Thanks,” Richie murmured.

“Did you have to say anything like she did?”

“Just ‘amen.’ I think.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Eddie asked again, his hand resting on Richie’s which was still gripping the gear shift. “Did something happen?”

“Nothing happened,” Richie replied, moving his hand to the steering wheel. “Everything’s fine. Let’s get this shindig over with.”

Eddie said nothing for the rest of the car ride.

Richie liked his family. After all, compared to the rest of the Losers, he had basically had a charmed life, growing up with fucking Ozzie and Harriet. Sure, growing up his parents hadn't always understand his jokes or his inability to sit still, and sure, his sisters had always teased or annoyed him but, hey, it could've been worse. He could've grown up like Bev or Eddie/

He glanced over at his husband, who was standing awkwardly with a drink in his hand as Richie's mother tried to get him to eat another serving of baked ziti. He smiled. The poor bastard was always mildly uncomfortable around the overly affectionate Tozier family. The first time his mom had hugged Eddie, Richie thought he was going to explode.

"Mom, he's cutting back on dairy," he said, stepping up to his husband's rescue. He saw Eddie relax ever so slightly.

"There's barely any dairy in this," Maggie Tozier insisted.

"It's literally oozing ricotta and mozzarella cheese," Richie sighed.

Maggie rolled her eyes.

"At least eat some of the salad, then," she continued. "But save room for cake."

"Don't you have like several dozen grandkids to force-feed instead of my husband?"

Maggie scoffed and put her hands on her hips.

"You're so annoying, Richard," she said fondly.

"Learned from the best," he shot back and leaned down to kiss her on her cheek. Maggie smiled before heading off to attend to the other guests. Richie turned to Eddie and put his arm around his waist.

"You okay?" he asked.

“Yeah, fine,” Eddie sighed. “Just the semi-annual get accosted into eating more by your mom. Why does she keep trying to fatten me up?”

“It’s a mom thing,” Richie shrugged. “Plus, she’s probably jealous that you’re in your forties and have the body of a fucking marathon runner.”

Their youngest nephew had chosen that moment to walk past the two of them.

“You said the f-word,” he said, staring up at them wide-eyed.

“You gonna tattle on us?” Richie shot back. He shook his head quickly. “Good.”

“Eric, quit pestering your uncles, go outside and play with your cousins,” Sarah said. Her son rushed off to the back patio and disappeared. She immediately threw her arms around Richie and hugged her brother tightly. “I meant to say this earlier but thanks for coming. Both of you.”

“Of course,” Eddie said quickly.

“And I had to come, I’m the all-important sponsor,” Richie replied as he hugged her back.

Sarah stepped back and rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, sure,” she replied. “But you did make Fiona’s day.” Richie shrugged. “No, I’m serious. You know how hard it was to convince her to stay in CCD for confirmation? She wanted out a year ago.”

“Oh yeah?” Richie asked, a nervous itch in his throat.

“Why not let her quit?” Eddie asked. “What’s the big deal?”

Sarah shrugged and took a deep breath.

“I mean, I don’t really care but you know it would’ve broken Mom’s heart,” she said.

Richie nodded once and remained silent. Realization washed over his sister's face. She reached out and rested her hand on his arm.

"Not that she's ever said anything about Lydia and Tess," she said quickly. Richie shot her a dubious look and she insisted, "No, seriously, Rich. I'd tell you if she did."

"Well, it's not like she can really expect two gay dads to raise their kids Catholic, right?" he said, huffing a laugh. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Eddie gingerly taking a sip of his drink and avoiding eye contact with him or his sister.

"Rich, she doesn't care, honest," Sarah said. "If anything, you're lucky. I was the first one with kids so I had to uphold all the family traditions. Fucking sucked."

"What fucking sucked?" Fiona appeared behind her mother.

"Hey, no swearing," Richie said, throwing his arm around his niece's shoulders. "As your sponsor, I have to report this to the Vatican."

Fiona rolled her eyes.

"There's a lot about you I could report to the Vatican," she shot back.

Eddie laughed and nearly choked on his drink. Richie smacked him on the back.

"Touché, young Skywalker," Richie replied. "Happy to be done with CCD?"

"Ugh, yes, finally," she groaned. "Now I don't have to worry about getting written up by Mother Superior."

"What'd you do to her?"

"Nothing!" Fiona insisted. "I just wore my Planned Parenthood shirt a couple times to CCD. No big deal."

Richie laughed and kissed the top of her head. Eddie smirked and shook his head.

“That’s my girl,” he said, grinning.

“Thanks, Uncle Richie,” she said. “And thanks, Uncle Eddie, for coming, too.”

“Oh, no problem,” Eddie said quietly as his face reddened slightly. Richie felt his heart melt.

“I meant to ask you,” he said to his niece, “why’d you pick St. Agatha for your confirmation name? What’d she do?”

“She’s who you pray to for breast cancer,” Fiona replied, shrugging, “and I figured it’d be nice since Grandma’s a survivor.”

Richie swallowed and squeezed his arm around his niece.

“That’s good of you, kiddo,” he said softly.

“Plus, all the old paintings have her carrying her own boobs on a plate after she was tortured,” Fiona continued. “Isn’t that badass?”

Eddie raised his eyebrows as Sarah shook her head, sighing. Richie merely grinned.

“That’s something, for sure,” he agreed.

There was a sudden trappling of little feet and they looked up to see Tess rushing towards them, breathless and pouting.

“Daddy, Papa, Lydia won’t let me go on the swings,” she whined loudly. “It’s my turn now.”

Sarah and Fiona both smiled fondly as Eddie and Richie sighed and dutifully followed their youngest to the backyard in an effort to prevent the beginnings of World War III.

It was past nine by the time they arrived home. Richie carried a sleeping Tess to her bedroom while Eddie fixed Lydia a snack before sending her off to bed, as well.

They met in their room, dressed for sleep, and, before Eddie could

say anything, Richie gathered him into his arms. He closed his eyes and exhaled shakily.

“Rich?” Eddie whispered. “You okay?”

“Yeah, just...thank you.”

“For what, babe?”

“For coming along with me today.”

Eddie looked up at his husband and frowned.

“Come on,” he said, “of course, I was going to come along.”

“Yeah, but I know it wasn’t fun or even comfortable for you.”

“It was fine,” Eddie insisted and leaned up to kiss Richie gently. “The kids were happy to see their cousins and you were happy to see your family. That’s all I need.”

“Don’t be such a sap,” Richie groaned, taking Eddie’s hand and pulling him towards the bed. Eddie grinned at him.

“Seriously, though, I know I bitched and moaned all week about it, but it was actually a good day,” Eddie continued as he allowed Richie to pull him onto the bed.

“Yeah?” Richie asked. “Which bit? Me looking scared shitless at the altar with Fiona?”

“You didn’t look scared shitless,” Eddie replied, running a hand through Richie’s hair. “No, my favorite bit was seeing you interact with her. Made me a little less worried about our girls’ teenage years.”

Richie furrowed his brow.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re so good with her,” Eddie continued. “And she actually listens to you, which we both know teens aren’t apt to do. So even though I

worry about handling Lydia and Tess as teenagers, I know we'll do okay."

Richie blinked at him and for once, found himself speechless. Eddie smirked.

"Shut up, Eds," he finally murmured and rubbed a hand over his face. "And stop talking about our girls growing up."

"Okay, okay," Eddie laughed.

Richie wrapped his arms around Eddie and kissed him deeply, groaning as Eddie pushed a leg between his own. He smiled against Richie's lips.

"We should go visit your family more often if you get like this afterwards," he whispered, palming Richie's erection through his boxer shorts.

"Do me a favor," Richie gasped, "don't bring up my family when I'm hard, babe."

Eddie laughed again and it was the loveliest sound to Richie's ears.

"What did you see in the deadlights? What did you see, Richie? How do you know you're not still there? Floating in the deadlights? Do you think this is real? Your children? Your husband? Or do they float, too?"

Richie squinted into the blinding light. He could just begin to see his daughters and Eddie in the distance. He screamed. They paid him no mind.

"They're so happy. The three of them."

They did look happy. Laughing and playing. Richie screamed again but it sounded like white noise to his own ears. He could just make out Tess cocking her head to the side, as if suddenly aware of a low noise in the distance. He begged her to see him.

The Clown put It's arm around Richie's shoulders and smiled down at

him, sharp teeth glistening and red lips split.

"You just want them to be happy, don't you?" It said.

Richie wanted to tell It that It was dead, It was gone forever. But the words were trapped in his throat, choking him.

"But I can get them for you," It continued in a sing-song voice. "If you want them back, tell me. I'm your friend, Richie. I want you to be happy. Isn't that what your mother said so long ago? 'I just want you to be happy, Richie.'"

He clenched his eyes shut and try to quell the nausea rising in his stomach. It was what his mother had said to him when he had finally come out, weeping and steeling his nerves for the worst.

A clammy hand touched his cheek. He opened his eyes and saw Eddie, Lydia, and Tess standing in from him, but they had never looked at him with such hate in their eyes. He opened his mouth to say their names but his husband put his arms around both their girls and turned them away.

"If you want them back, just ask your old friend Pennywise. My prices are always fair. I gave you Eddie back, remember? And all I asked in return was for two lovely little girls."

Richie screamed.

Someone was calling his name but he was too busy trying to untangle himself from the bedsheets to notice. He had to get to his daughters.

Hands grabbed his arms and he screamed again.

"Rich, stop it! It's not real, whatever it is, it's not real."

"Fuck, shit, let me go," he begged. He managed to throw the sheets off him, half falling off the bed in the process. He stood and rushed out of the room, Eddie's voice calling after him. Lydia was already awake and in the hallway, rubbing at her eyes tiredly.

"What's going on?" she mumbled.

"Oh, God, Lydia, baby," Richie gasped wetly and pulled her into his

shaking arms.

“Dad?” she asked, muffled against him. “What’s wrong? What’s going on?”

“Richie, relax,” Eddie said gently, putting his hand on his shoulder. “It was just a dream.”

A sudden thought burst in his head.

“Tess,” he said, panicked. He took Lydia by the hand and dragged her to her sister’s bedroom. He opened the door to see his youngest daughter sleeping soundly, her stuffed unicorn held limply in one hand. “Tess.”

In two long strides, Richie was beside her bed. He picked her up into his arms, ignoring Eddie’s protests. Tess curled against his chest. His heartbeat was just beginning to slow down.

“Come on,” he whispered to Lydia. She followed him into the bedroom he shared with his husband.

Richie carried Tess to their bed, now completely a mess from his flailing, and laid her gently on it. She briefly opened her eyes.

“Go back to sleep,” he whispered. “You’re safe now.” She nodded, yawned, and immediately fell back to sleep. He kissed her forehead gently as he smoothed back her hair.

“What are you doing?” Eddie asked, exhausted.

He straightened and turned towards his husband and oldest daughter. His heart clenched painfully as he noticed the nervous look on her face. He swallowed.

“Hey, we’re gonna have a sleepover tonight, okay?” he said, clearing his throat.

Lydia frowned and looked up at Eddie, confused. Richie gazed at them imploringly.

“Come on, it’s fine,” he insisted.

“Rich,” Eddie sighed. “This is crazy.”

“Lyds, come on, sweetheart.”

After a moment’s hesitation, she shrugged and climbed into bed, settling beside her sister.

“There we go,” Richie said, laying down beside Tess and tucking himself and his daughters in. “A big snuggle sandwich.”

He glanced up at Eddie, watching him shake his head slowly. He swallowed, worried that he would leave. He exhaled heavily when Eddie turned off the light, climbed in beside Lydia, and pulled the blankets up.

“Go to sleep, Rich,” he murmured in the dark. “You, too, Lydia.”

“Uh-huh,” Lydia yawned. “Love you guys.”

“We love you, too,” Richie whispered and realized he was close to tears. He steadied his breathing and spent the rest of the night awake, watching over his family.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

5. Anxiety

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie's youngest daughter struggles with separation anxiety. Or is it something else?

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

“No, please, don’t do this to me, baby,” Eddie begged.

He tried to straighten and gently remove the arms that were locked around his neck but toddlers in the midst of hysteria apparently have the strength of twenty men.

“Tess, it’s okay,” Richie insisted over the loud sobs of their youngest daughter as he, too, tried to pry her death grip off of Eddie. “Daddy’s just going to work. He’ll be back later to play with us, I promise.”

He managed to free one hand from Eddie’s neck and, in her brief confusion as to why she was suddenly no longer in control of her hand, gathered Tess up in his arms. Her screams only increased in pitch. She launched a bodily attack this time, kicking and flailing with all her might. She managed to land one solid kick to his stomach, and he nearly doubled over.

“Just go,” he grunted at Eddie. “I’ll distract her.”

“Rich, I—”

“You gotta go to work, just leave, you’re makin’ it worse standing here.”

Eddie frowned as Richie turned, Tess still hysterical in his arms even though he kept telling her all the fun games they could play now. Eddie hated leaving the house like this but he didn’t have any other choice. He turned towards the door and quickly slipped out, locking it behind him before heading towards his car.

He collapsed in the front seat, and winced. He could still hear Tess’s hysterical cries from inside the house. Everything in his heart told him to ignore work and return to his daughter but he knew the parenting books he had obsessively read before adopting their first child were against that. He also knew that if he walked back into that house, he would quite possibly never return to work again.

He started the car, took a deep breath, and drove away.

“This can’t just be a phase.”

Eddie rubbed his forehead, incredibly exhausted. He looked up and watched as Richie haphazardly threw their clean laundry into their dresser. He couldn’t bring himself to care.

“I mean, separation anxiety is a thing, I get it, but shouldn’t it be for both parents?” Richie continued.

Eddie shrugged.

“Maybe not,” he said quietly. “Maybe it’s just because I’m the one who leaves every morning.”

Richie shook his head and ran a hand through his hair.

“It should be getting better though,” he sighed. “I mean, you going to work isn’t new for her anymore.”

Eddie rubbed his face.

"We need to find her a therapist," he said.

"They have therapists for toddlers?"

Eddie nodded. Richie sighed again and sat beside him on the bed, his shoulders slumped. Eddie took his hand into his and ran his thumb along his knuckles.

"I hate this," Richie mumbled. "I hate seeing her so upset."

"Me too."

"She made herself sick once."

Eddie's heart fell and he stared at his husband in shock.

"What?" he gasped.

"Like a month ago," Richie admitted softly. "I thought it was because I gave her French toast for the first time but she kept crying so hard after you left and the next thing I knew, she lost her lunch all over the floor."

Horror and pain and guilt whirled around inside Eddie.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked breathlessly.

"I told you, I thought it was just regular toddler throw up, but now I think she...I thought she was gonna get sick again today. Fuck!" Richie dropped his head into his hands and yanked at his hair. "I'm such a fucking shit dad."

"Rich—"

"Our baby's suffering and all I could think to do is put on *Cinderella* and rope Lydia into playing dress up to distract her." Richie sniffed and shook his head. "I'm just like my parents."

"What are you talking about?"

"My parents didn't know what to do with me as a kid," he murmured. "They loved me but they had no idea how to handle a kid with ADHD"

and anxiety. I mean, it was the 80s, they didn't have the resources but we fucking do and I'm still fucking up."

Eddie took Richie into his arms and held him silently for several long minutes until his breathing got under control. He rubbed his back and tried desperately to think of the proper thing to say but he had never had a way with words, not like Bill.

Richie exhaled shakily and straightened. He wiped at his eyes and sniffed again.

"Thank God it's Friday, right?" he muttered, huffing a laugh. "At least we got a weekend to recoup."

Eddie brushed Richie's hair from his forehead and smoothed it gently.

"And we'll look into a therapist for her," he said. "We'll figure it out. I promise, Rich."

Richie nodded and sighed before resting his head on Eddie's shoulder. Warmth spread throughout Eddie and for once, he felt like the stronger of the two.

"It's been getting better," Richie admitted. "She still cries more often than not but not like before. This week we got two days in a row without a freakout."

Eddie's eyelids fluttered. Tess was in his arms, fast asleep, on the living room couch, *The Wizard of Oz* playing softly on the TV. Though he was speaking quietly, Eddie could still hear Richie as he spoke on the phone in the kitchen. From the relieved happiness in his voice when he answered, Eddie assumed he was speaking to Bev.

"I don't know," Richie continued. "It's clear she has some anxiety issues but hopefully we can nip it in the bud before it gets worse as she gets older. The therapy seems to be helping."

Eddie glanced down as his daughter peacefully slept, curled up on his chest. He ran his thumb along her arm and smiled gently. She always

looked younger and somehow smaller when she slept. Eddie wished, not for the first time, that she could look this calm and serene when she was awake.

“No, it’s still just when Eddie leaves,” Richie said, his voice dropping even lower. Eddie had the distinct feeling that Richie had assumed he had also fallen asleep in front of the TV. “And it’s not just that. Sometimes she gets these looks...like, far-off looks. I can’t explain it.”

Eddie swallowed. He, too, had noticed that particular quirk of their daughter’s, only he called them ‘long-gone looks’ because, for brief moments, it seemed as if Tess had disappeared somewhere deep inside herself. Her eyes would go out of focus, her entire little body would still, and for a moment, she was gone. It had frightened him the first time he had seen it but she would always blink and smile up at him and Eddie would nearly collapse under the overwhelming relief.

“I know, I know, you think I’m crazy,” Richie sighed, “but I worry. It’s more than just being sensitive or anxious, Bev. It’s something else.”

Eddie tightened his grip around his daughter. He had never said it aloud to his husband, but he had been plagued by the same worry.

“I don’t know what to do,” Richie said. “I remember when we first started looking into adoption, I was so fucking...I thought I would be able to handle anything because of the shit we went through as kids but it turns out, I feel really fucking helpless.”

Well, Eddie thought sadly, it wouldn’t be the first time I’ve overlooked Richie’s feelings.

“No, they passed out on the couch watching a movie,” Richie continued, huffing a laugh. “Yeah, I’ll tell him. I will, I promise. Thanks. Give Ben a big kiss on the mouth for me, okay? With lots of tongue. Love you.”

Eddie froze. He briefly considered shutting his eyes and pretending to be asleep but to his immense relief, Richie merely pushed back his chair at the kitchen table and slowly walked down the hall to their

bedroom. Eddie exhaled a breath and turned back to the TV. Dorothy was crying about not being allowed in to the Emerald City. He sighed and closed his eyes, gently rubbing his daughter's back.

Rainy days had never been his favorite when he was a child. They meant loneliness, isolation, and long days with his mother fretting over him. He always had his worst asthma attacks on rainy days. Those had been dark and dreary days that never seemed to end.

Eddie glanced into the living room. Lydia was sprawled on the couch, munching on apple slices, while Tess played with Barbie dolls on the floor. *The Lion King* was playing on the TV. Through the windows, he could see the rain falling even harder. He turned back to the cutting board. Rainy days weren't so bad now.

His phone buzzed. He picked it up.

Just got to the venue. Gonna grab dinner with my agent and the promoter before the show. I'll call you before I go on.

Eddie swiped his phone open and began typing his reply.

Have a good time and break a leg. All's quiet here. Lydia asked if she could stay up until you get home tonight but I squashed that.

Richie responded immediately.

Yeah, when I told her I had a show this morning, she told me you already did a show last month. She's very persuasive.

Eddie smiled and shook his head.

Well, she's fine now so go live it up down there in AC. But don't go too crazy.

I'm gonna eat a burger and maybe since I'm feeling wild even drink a soda. Really let loose. I'll call you later. Love you, babe.

Eddie smirked as he texted that he loved Richie back and put his phone away. He returned to the task of chopping eggplant and

making sure it didn't get too quiet in the living room. He and Richie had quickly learned that there was no sound more terrifying for a parent than silence.

Lydia was still loudly snacking on her apple slices and explaining the movie to her sister. Tess, meanwhile, simply hummed in response. From the music, Eddie could tell they were at the infamous stampede scene. He still didn't understand how kids could enjoy that movie so much. It seemed so fucking dark. Richie said that because Simba gets adopted by two gay dads, they should let it slide (Eddie hadn't bothered to ask if they were supposed to be Timon and Pumbaa).

He dropped the chopped eggplant into the pot and began working on the bell peppers when he heard Lydia insist with all the wisdom that comes with being an older sibling, "No, he's not sleeping, he's dead."

"I know," Tess replied. "But he'll get up."

"No, Tess, when someone dies, they stay dead. Mufasa's not coming back."

"Yes, he is."

"Nuh-uh."

"Sometimes they come back."

"Tess, that's not—"

"Daddy came back."

The knife slipped and Eddie felt his stomach clench as he watched the blade miss his finger by millimeters. He was suddenly aware that he wasn't breathing.

"What are you talking about?" Lydia continued. "Daddy's not dead."

"I know that," Tess replied impatiently. "But he did die and he came back."

"No, he didn't."

“Yes, he did.”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“No, no!”

“Yes, yes!”

“DADDY.”

“Girls, settle down,” he heard himself saying as he walked into the living room.

“Tess says you died,” Lydia said quickly, pointing at her sister, who merely looked puzzled at the fact that this was even an argument.

Eddie turned towards his youngest daughter and swallowed.

“Tess, sweetheart, what makes you say that?” he asked hollowly. “I’m right here. Quite alive.”

“I know but—”

“You shouldn’t lie,” Lydia observed importantly.

“Lydia, please,” Eddie sighed. He crouched down in front of Tess and took one of her hands in his own. “I’m right here. See? Everything’s fine.”

“I know that, Daddy, you’re okay now,” Tess continued.

“You can’t die and come back,” Lydia insisted again.

“Jesus did,” Tess shot back. “Grandma told us.”

Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose between his fingers. Great, now he and Richie had to have another conversation about setting boundaries with Richie’s family. He was not looking forward to that.

“Tess, sweetheart, what exactly are you talking about? I’m obviously alive and okay.”

“But I saw it, Daddy,” she insisted, a trembling whine in her voice.

“Saw what?”

“You and the monster and Papa. I saw it and I cried lots and lots but then you got better so I wasn’t scared no more.”

The blood rang in Eddie’s ears and he almost missed hearing his eldest daughter haughtily reply, “There’s no such thing as monsters.”

“And it hurt you but Papa made sure you got better and the monster disappeared forever. That’s why you have that boo boo.” Tess tapped him gently on the chest.

Later, Eddie would be amazed at his ability to compartmentalize. All he could think in that breathless moment was, I’m burning the eggplant.

He stood up on shaky legs, smiled (or at least attempted to) at his daughters, and told them to apologize to one another for arguing and finish the movie. He walked, as if in a dream, back into the kitchen, turned off the stove, and suddenly realized that tears were streaming down his face.

You thought you knew fear once, laughed a voice that sounded like a macabre combination of his mother and the clown, but you’re in for quite a ride, Eddie Bear.

“It’s back,” Richie exclaimed as he feverishly paced around their bedroom. “It has to be back. We didn’t kill It.”

“You don’t know that,” Eddie sighed.

“Then why did she say that?” Richie asked, his eyes wild. “It’s back and It followed us here.”

“That’s impossible.”

“No, what’s impossible is that a fucking space alien takes the form of a clown and a leper and fucking Paul Bunyan to fuck with us and kill

people we love,” Richie insisted, breathless. “That’s fucking impossible but it fucking happened so why would it not happen again?”

“Rich, our scars are gone,” Eddie said, holding out his hand. “It’s gone.”

Richie shook his head. Eddie could tell by the look on his face and his frantic movements that he was on the verge of a panic attack. He took both of Richie’s hands in his and begged him to breathe with him. Richie snatched his hands away.

“We gotta call Mike,” he gasped.

“It’s two in the morning,” Eddie reminded him.

“So what? This is an emergency.” Richie stopped moving and pointed at Eddie. “And you should’ve called me as soon as it happened.”

“And what would you have done?” Eddie snapped. “Tell your manager, sorry, I can’t do the show, you gotta refund all the tickets because my four-year-old said something weird. Come the fuck on.”

“How are you so calm about this?” Richie asked wildly.

“Because it was probably just a dream she had.”

“Bullshit.”

“Think about it logically,” Eddie continued, “dreams are just our brains trying to make sense of the shit we see and experience, right?” Richie stared at him doubtfully. “Tess has seen the scar on my chest. Her little kid brain came up with an explanation for it.”

“An explanation that includes me and a monster and you dying?”

“We’re her parents, of course she’d dream about us,” Eddie replied. “And all kids are afraid of monsters.”

“She said you died and came back.” A tormented look crossed Richie’s face and his eyes were suddenly wet. “You did.”

"Parents die in all Disney movies. So her brain used that to explain the scar."

Richie hesitated and ran a hand through his wild hair. Eddie noticed more strands of gray.

"I don't know," Richie murmured.

"I do," Eddie said. "It was a dream. Tess had a bad dream. It's nothing to worry about. I just wanted to tell you so you didn't have a freak out like this in front of her if she ever brought it up again."

Richie's shoulders slumped. Eddie bit his tongue. He hadn't meant to make him feel guilty. Richie raised his eyes to meet Eddie's.

"Are you sure?" he asked hoarsely. "Are you sure she was just talking about a dream?"

Eddie took Richie's hand again and squeezed it reassuringly.

"I'm sure," he lied.

Weeks went by, then months. Tess's separation anxiety seemed to be improving and though she still got that long-gone looks occasionally, she never mentioned anything about death or monsters or people coming back when they shouldn't have. She still threw tantrums, still favored being held and read to by Eddie, still was an exhausting four-year-old but both Richie and Eddie were more than happy with that.

Perhaps it all had been a phase. Kids could be weird, Eddie figured. He and Richie both knew that to be true. And she was the younger sister. She needed her moments to act out for attention, right? Nothing to fret over. Just typical, run-of-the-mill childhood. Eddie and Richie began to relax and enjoy the ride. Besides, with two clever and rambunctious children under ten, they were far too busy to constantly worry. Like today.

Eddie was packing the cooler with juice, water bottles, and snacks. Richie was searching for his sneakers and Lydia was in the midst of her now daily monologue about the merits of owning a puppy.

"Not now, kiddo, we gotta get going," Richie said, emptying a duffel bag of old gym clothes onto the floor. No sneakers.

Eddie grimaced from the kitchen.

"You're cleaning that up later and washing those clothes," he called. "They stink."

"We could get a tiny puppy," Lydia continued. "One that doesn't get big and slobbery."

"Lydia, go get your sister and make sure she's got a jacket on," Eddie said as he was silently debating which brand of organic fruit snacks to pack.

"And I'd clean up after it, like how I always clean my room."

"Your room is still a mess from Tuesday," Richie replied, now on his knees in front of the hall closet. "Go get your sister. Your cousins are all waiting for us at the park."

"But—"

"Ah-ha! Found them," Richie exclaimed, waving a pair of old Converse in his hand. "Lyds, Tess, now."

Lydia sighed dramatically before stomping off down the hall to her sister's room. Eddie zipped up the cooler and watched Richie tie up his laces.

"You're wearing those?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"What? They're cool."

"You know you're not in high school anymore, right?"

"Forgive me for not wanting to dress like a grandpa."

Eddie glanced down at his outfit.

"Grandpas don't dress like this," he insisted.

"Babe, no one dresses like that."

Eddie was prevented from flipping Richie off by the arrival of their eldest daughter.

“Tess is being weird,” she stated, an odd look on her face.

“Did you tell her we’re leaving?” Eddie asked before he realized he nearly forgot the allergy pills and went back to the cabinet.

“Yeah, but she’s being weird,” Lydia repeated.

“I’ll get her,” Richie sighed. “Put your jacket on, Lyds.” He went off down the hall to retrieve their daughter.

Eddie rifled through the medicine cabinet, searching for the children’s non-drowsy allergy medicine and wondering if it was overkill to bring ibuprofen, too. He opened the bottle and peered in to see how many pills were left. He never got a chance to really look, however, because he dropped the opened bottle on the floor when he heard his husband scream their youngest daughter’s name in horror.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

6. Something Interesting

Summary for the Chapter:

Something very odd is happening to Richie and Eddie's daughter. Richie tries to understand what it all means.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

TRIGGER WARNING: Discussion of medical issues (which I based on research, so may be inaccurate) and use of a gay slur

Richie Tozier was quite familiar with fear.

It had been a constant companion throughout most of his life, a close friend to his anxiety. He had felt fear all during that fateful summer in '89; when he had seen his own face staring up from a missing child poster; when Eddie had broken his arm and couldn't stop screaming as the clown stalked closer and closer; when he was in college and suddenly gay-bashing was all over the news and he just kept his head down and said nothing; when he had first stepped on stage; when he had finally come out to his family; when Mike had called to bring him back to Derry; when he had confessed his feelings to Eddie in that hospital; and when he and Eddie had finally been told they had been approved for adoption.

But, he discovered, he had only known true terror twice.

Once, when Eddie's eyes had dimmed as he bled out in his arms in the bowels of Derry.

Second, when he walked into his youngest daughter's bedroom, and watched her face slacken, her body stiffen unnaturally, and her tiny body collapse onto the floor.

He stared at his bedroom ceiling and tried to make sense of the day but it was all one panic-stricken blur. He vaguely recalled gathering his daughter into his arms, her body impossibly light and limp, and then, seemingly in a blink, he was standing in the ER, Eddie and the doctors both asking him question after question of what happened, what did he see, what had she said, had she eaten anything, did she hit her head on the ground?

The only thing he remembered clearly was the feeling of overwhelming relief when Tess had opened her eyes and, in an extremely puzzled voice, asked why he was crying.

Richie took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly, staring at the ceiling.

"Can't sleep?" Eddie whispered.

Richie shook his head. Eddie reached his arm over Tess, who was sleeping peacefully between them, and rested his hand over Richie's heart.

"It's okay," he whispered, "we're gonna get through this."

Richie scrubbed his hand over his face. He swallowed, trying desperately to not give way to tears.

"Rich..."

"How are you so fucking calm about this?" he asked blankly.

Eddie huffed a quiet laugh.

"I'm not," he replied, glancing down at their sleeping daughter.

Richie took his hand away from his face and gazed at his husband. He had to admit, even in waning blue darkness, he could see the thrumming anxiety under Eddie's skin. He sighed again.

"What are we gonna do, Eds?"

"We can't know until we get the EEG results back."

Richie closed his eyes and tried to push the image of their tiny daughter on the big hospital bed, electrodes attached to her head, out of his mind. Eddie smoothed his hand on his chest in a little circle.

"No matter what, we can't let them see us freak out, alright?" he whispered.

Richie nodded, turned onto his side, and laid a gentle arm over their daughter, his hand on Eddie's side. Neither man slept for the rest of the night.

"I had no idea there were so many different kinds of seizures," Eddie muttered, flipping through the packets of papers the nurse had handed to them in the waiting room.

Richie said nothing, his arms merely tightened around Tess as she sat on his lap, preoccupied with her father's old, still working Game Boy Color in her hands.

"And it could be from anything," Eddie continued, turning to another page. "Allergies, a fever, epilepsy, autism. I mean..." he sighed and closed the pamphlet, rubbing his eyes tiredly. He dropped his hand and gazed up at Richie. "Are you okay?"

Richie shook his head, his jaw clenched and his back ramrod straight.

"Rich, we'll—"

The examination room door opened and the doctor, a pleasant-looking woman with a smile on her face and a tiny stuffed rabbit in her hands, walked in. Eddie smiled in response and shook her hand but Richie didn't move. He could never remember her name.

“Hi, Tess,” she said happily. “How are you feeling today?”

“Okay,” Tess said quietly, a dubious look on her face.

“Good, I’m happy to hear that,” she said. “You’ve been very brave these last few days. So we have a treat for you.”

She leaned forward and held the stuffed rabbit out to Tess, who looked at it longingly before turning her gaze up to her father.

“Go on, it’s a gift for you,” Eddie said, smiling gently.

Tess grinned and grabbed the rabbit, clutching it to her chest.

“What do you say, Tess?”

“Thank you,” she whispered shyly.

The doctor smiled and straightened.

“And you two,” she said, looking at Richie and Eddie, “how are you doing?”

Richie remained silent as Eddie replied, “We’re getting by.”

“Good, good,” the doctor replied. “I’m sure you both are anxious but I have good news. As far as we can tell, there was no physical reason for her seizure. Nothing in her brain as far as the tests show.”

Richie exhaled a breath and collapsed in on himself, feeling suddenly as if he just ran a marathon. Eddie’s hand on his arm tightened.

“Then why did she have one?” Richie asked.

“As I’m sure you’ve seen, there are a great many reasons why a child may experience a seizure,” the doctor sighed. She glanced down at a chart in her hands. “I understand you’ve had Tess in therapy for anxiety issues?”

Both men nodded. Richie swallowed and felt oddly guilty, as if Tess had inherited his own anxiety disorder.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if it was related to that,” she explained. “An

extreme sort of panic attack. Where there any triggers that day? Perhaps something that put her out of comfort zone?"

"We were just taking the kids to their cousin's little league game," Eddie explained. "Nothing too out of the order."

"But anxiety doesn't need a reason," Richie muttered.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Eddie gaze at him. The doctor nodded.

"I would keep an eye on her to see if her anxiety triggers another episode like this," she said.

"*Another* one?" Richie repeated, stunned. "We're just supposed to wait around until she has another one?"

"Based on the test results and her history, I doubt she will have another one like that," she said gently.

"And what if she does? What then?"

"We bring her back to the hospital," Eddie said softly.

Richie stared at his husband, his eyes wide.

"That's it?" he asked, hoarsely. "That's all we can do?"

"If she does have more episodes like this one, then we could look into medication but I really think this was an anomaly," the doctor continued.

"That's your guess," Richie claimed.

"Richie—"

"And you're just accepting it?" he asked Eddie wildly.

"The tests don't show anything physical," Eddie repeated.

Richie sighed and leaned his head back against the wall. After a moment's silence, the doctor and Eddie began speaking again, discussing plans and ideas and what to do in the future. Richie

ignored them. A soft kiss at his chin, and he looked down. Tess was holding the rabbit up, pressing it against his face.

"It's okay, Papa," she said.

Tears sprang to his eyes. He smiled at his daughter.

"So that's it," Richie sighed, leaning against the porch railing. "Nothing we can do but see if she has another one and what triggered it."

Mike put his hand on Richie's shoulder and squeezed it.

"It's tough," he said gently, "but the alternative answers are worse."

Richie shrugged.

"Yeah, I know, but at least they're answers," he muttered. "I just hate feeling so fucking helpless."

"I know," Mike replied. "But you and Eddie are on top of it. He was telling me before that you got her in therapy."

"She's been in it before this all happened," Richie said. He suddenly itched for a cigarette but it had been years. "We had to update her therapist about all of this and she agreed with the neurologist that it was just like...a fucking panic attack. But I've never seen a panic attack quite like that."

"They must know what they're talking about."

"Yeah, but they didn't see it," Richie insisted, crossing his arms over his chest. "I saw her, I'm the only one who really did. And everyone else wants to dismiss it. Even Eddie."

"You know that's not true, man."

Richie frowned and looked down at his shoes. Guilt began to rise in his throat like bile.

“Yeah, you’re right, I’m just fucking...really fucking...”

“Frustrated?” Mike offered.

“To say the fucking least.”

Mike smiled and looped an arm around Richie’s shoulders, squeezing tightly.

“Well, we’re all here for you guys, I promise,” Mike said affectionately. “Anytime you need one of us, you know we’ll be here.”

“I know,” Richie mumbled and ran a hand through his hair. “And thanks for stopping by today. You didn’t have to, you know. You didn’t have to do a layover just to see us.”

Mike shrugged.

“Cheaper seats that way,” he replied. “And I get to see my favorite all-American suburban parents. Win win.”

Richie laughed and shook his head.

“Sometimes I still can’t believe this is my life,” he admitted. “Like I’ll have these weird out of body moments where I look at Lydia and Tess and have to remind myself, oh yeah, these are my kids. I’m a parent now. It’s wild.”

“I can imagine,” Mike laughed. “But you two are doing a good job. They’re great kids.”

Richie shrugged. He fell silent for a long moment, as if searching for the right words. Mike waited patiently.

“You know, Tess has those moments, too,” he said quietly. “The doctor said they could be, uh, absence seizures but the EEG results were totally normal. I think they’re something else.”

“You lost me, Rich,” Mike admitted. “But I know nothing about this sort of thing.”

“Remember whenever we saw Pennywise as kids?” Richie continued. “When we were alone and we saw It? And even though it seemed to last forever, sometimes we’d just blink and It’d be gone?”

“Yeah,” Mike said, a frown on his face.

“Have you ever wondered what we looked like from the other end?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, when I was back in Derry and It was taunting me from the Paul Bunyan statue,” Richie explained, a slight tremor in his voice, “the park was full of people. I wasn’t alone. So what did they see when they looked over at me freaking the fuck out? Was I frozen or talking out loud to nothing?”

“Rich,” Mike said slowly, “are you saying that you think It is the reason behind your daughter’s seizure?”

“No, I–fuck,” Richie groaned and began pacing, his hands shaking, “I don’t know what I think. I just...she says things, alright? She told Eddie once that he died and came back and that’s why he has that scar on his chest. When we bought a hammock she said, oh like the one we had when we were little? How the fuck would she know about those things? We never told either of girls anything about Derry. But Tess somehow fucking knows.”

“Okay, wait, calm down, buddy,” Mike said, reaching for Richie’s arm. “Breathe with me.”

Richie hadn’t realized he was panicking. He followed Mike’s breathing for several long moments before his heart stopped racing.

“Sorry,” he muttered, looking down.

“You don’t have to apologize,” Mike insisted. He took a deep breath. “Listen, I don’t know how Tess knows these things. I mean, couldn’t it be like her imagination or just lucky guesses?”

“You sound like Eddie,” Richie mumbled dejectedly. “I swear, it’s something else.”

“Okay, I believe you,” Mike replied. He frowned, rubbing at his chin. “Hm, I could do some digging around for anything like this. I mean, I don’t necessarily believe in psychics but...”

“And I normally wouldn’t believe in killer clowns from outer space but here we are,” Richie said, grinning gruesomely.

Mike huffed a laugh and nodded.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he admitted. “Anything’s possible in this crazy world.”

“Don’t I fucking know it,” Richie sighed.

The world kept turning.

Richie could barely understand it. Eddie went back to work, Lydia continued her gymnastics and counted down the days for back to school, and Tess was still her high-strung self. They continued her therapy, and Richie kept an extremely close eye on her—to the point that she finally asked one day as he stared at her, “Are you okay, Papa?” God, he was the one turning into Eddie’s mother.

Still, the days turned into weeks and she, luckily never had another episode like that awful one. Richie was grateful; he was quite certain his heart couldn’t handle another one. Eddie was hopeful that perhaps it was all over, that her anxiety was getting under control and maybe, they didn’t have to worry anymore. But he wasn’t the one home all day with the girls, with Tess and her far-off looks and uncanny ability to seem to know what her father was thinking.

But he had promised Eddie he wouldn’t freak out in front of the girls, so Richie kept quiet. Well, as quiet as Richie Tozier could be.

It was nearing the end of August and Lydia was bouncing off the walls ready to start third grade and for her latest loose tooth to finally fall out. She was constantly nudging it with her tongue, showing it off to her sister who had never experienced such a life-changing event. Tess found it alarming.

"It doesn't hurt," Lydia explained, "it just feels weird. And then the Tooth Fairy comes and gives you money."

"Why?" Tess asked.

Lydia shrugged.

"I don't know," she said, in a rare admittance of uncertainty, "why does she do that, Papa?"

"I think she pays you for the teeth and then sells them at ridiculously inflated prices on the black market," Richie replied, cutting the crust off his youngest daughter's sandwich. "It's all about supply and demand."

"I think you're making that up," Lydia observed wisely.

"I never make things up," Richie said, placing Tess's sandwich on the plate in front of her. "The Tooth Fairy has a business to run."

"So the Tooth Fairy comes to our house?" Tess asked nervously. Richie's heart clenched. He should've known. She also found the Easter Bunny disturbing, but who could really blame her?

"Yeah, but she's tiny, so she sneaks in," Lydia answered. "Like Tinkerbell. It's not a big deal. All fairies are tiny."

Tess looked doubtful.

"I don't know," she muttered.

"It's true, fairies are tiny, right, Papa?"

Richie nodded, sitting beside his daughters at the table with his own sandwich (and Tess's discarded crusts).

"But you're not tiny," Tess declared, looking straight at her father.

A prickling of discomfort, a very specific one he hadn't felt in years, stabbed Richie in the chest. He froze and gazed at his daughter, his sandwich in half way up to his suddenly dry mouth.

"Papa's not a fairy!" Lydia laughed.

"But that boy called you one," Tess said, confusion evident on her face. "Is that mean? He seemed mean."

"What boy?" Richie asked hoarsely.

"I don't know," Tess shrugged. "He's bigger and he yells a lot."

Why the FUCK is she talking about Bowers in the present tense?

"Where did...when...where did you see this?" Richie asked, trying desperately to keep his voice steady.

Tess took a bite of her sandwich before answering.

"I don't know, I just saw it," she said.

"It?" Richie repeated, dropping his own sandwich and grasping his daughter's hand. "Tess, tell me exactly what you saw."

Both Lydia and Tess exchanged a glance of mild puzzlement. Their Papa was being weird.

"I saw you and the big kid and he called you a fairy," she said. "And you ran away."

"Was I...little? I mean, you saw me as a little kid? Like in the photos at Grandma's house?"

Tess nodded and laughed.

"You looked silly," she said.

"When was this?"

"Huh?"

"When did you see this?"

Tess shrugged.

"I don't remember."

Richie swallowed.

“How often do you see these things?”

“What things?” Tess asked, taking another bite of her sandwich. She seemed rather bored of this conversation.

“Things like...like the boy calling me names or Daddy dying and coming back.”

She furrowed her little brow and scrunched up her face as she thought.

“I don’t know,” she said, “sometimes. Sometimes lots and sometimes never.”

“Are they ever...scary?”

She shrugged.

“Sometimes, but not always.”

Lydia abruptly spat in her hand.

“Hey!” she exclaimed, happily. “My tooth came out!”

She held it up for her sister and father to see. The conversation ended.

“How can she know these things, Eds?” Richie whispered, his face in his hands.

“I...I don’t know,” Eddie admitted softly.

Richie raised his head and gazed, unblinking, at his husband.

“These aren’t lucky guesses. Eddie, you have to be honest with me,” he said, “have you ever told either of the girls anything about It?”

Eddie’s mouth fell open.

“Are you serious right now?” he demanded.

“Yes, just fucking tell me so I’ll stop wondering.”

“I never told them about It and you know I never did,” Eddie hissed. “The fuck kind of father do you think I am?”

“I’m just making sure!” Richie insisted, raising his hands in supplication. “I just...I feel like I’m going crazy trying to figure this out.”

Eddie sighed and sat beside his husband.

“Me too,” he muttered. “Fuck, I should’ve known.”

“Known what?”

“We...I’m too...” Eddie trailed off and sighed. “How could we think everything was behind us? That our kids wouldn’t be affected?”

Richie stared at Eddie, cold fear in the pit of his stomach.

“What are you saying?” he asked, blankly. “Do you regret our kids?”

“No!” Eddie insisted. “No, never that. Sometimes I just...regret that they got stuck with us as parents.”

“Huh,” Richie mumbled. “Sometimes I do, too.”

He wiped at his forehead, wincing when he realized how sweaty it was. His jumped suddenly. His phone was ringing. He hoped it wasn’t his manager demanding another show. He glanced down at his screen and felt a brief flutter of relief. It was Mike. He swiped it open.

“Hey, Mikey,” he greeted, failing miserably at sounding pleasantly happy.

“Hey, Rich, are you okay?” Mike asked.

“Yeah, sure, peachy, just tired,” Richie sighed. “I’m on Tooth Fairy duty tonight.”

“Ah,” Mike said, “Tess?”

“Lydia.”

“And how’s Tess been?”

“Fine, aside from the occasional cryptic mind-reading or whatever the fuck she’s doing.”

“Well, that’s why I wanted to call you,” Mike continued hurriedly. “I’ve been doing some research and I think I found something interesting.”

Richie’s eyes widened as he gripped the phone.

“Just...just fucking tell me it has nothing do with the clown,” he begged.

“No,” Mike promised, “something else. Something...interesting.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

7. Searching

Summary for the Chapter:

Eddie struggles while he and Richie search for answers about their daughter. But perhaps there's light in the darkness.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

"This is crazy," Eddie muttered, straightening and walking away from the desk. "Absolutely fucking crazy."

"Eds, come on," Richie implored him, turning away from the open laptop screen where Mike's face gazed up at him. "This is interesting stuff."

"Interesting but bullshit."

"You don't know that," Richie insisted.

"No, but I do know our daughter isn't a fucking science experiment," Eddie declared, whirling around, his hands waving wildly. "This is real life, not that show on Netflix."

Richie sighed as Mike hurriedly said, "I'm not saying Tess is that, I'm just saying, we have evidence of children with...with..."

“Powers?” Eddie provided, raising an eyebrow. “Like fucking Superman or something? Come the fuck on.”

“Charlie McGee claimed to start exhibiting pyrokinetic abilities as a toddler,” Mike said, flipping through a stack of papers. “It’s all right here in that *Rolling Stone* article from 1980.”

“And in the same article, it’s explained that her parents were mentally ill drug addicts and that the ‘explosion’ she caused with her mind was from an anti-government terrorist attack, Mike,” Eddie continued. “It says it right there in the link you sent us. Besides, even if this is true, our daughter isn’t exactly setting things on fire with her mind.”

“No, but I did find something that sounds an awful lot like what Tess is doing,” Mike continued.

“She’s doing nothing but being a kid,” Eddie said, exasperated. He looked at Richie. “I’m done with this. You want to stay up all night talking conspiracy theories and thinking our daughter is something out of *The X-Files*, go ahead, but I’m not listening to anymore of this.”

“Why not?” Richie begged. “How is any of this any crazier than what we went through?”

Eddie closed his eyes and sighed, a prickling of fear spreading through his body. It had to be crazy, it had to be, because if it wasn’t, then Pennywise wasn’t the worst of what this universe was capable of.

“Here,” Mike said suddenly, “I’m sending you some more links.”

A new email appeared in Richie’s inbox and he quickly opened it, clicking the first link. It was an article from an academic journal.

“The fuck’s this?” Richie mumbled, trying to make sense of the scholarly jargon in the first paragraph.

“There’s a girl out there, well, a teenager, and she has exhibited a lot of the same things Tess has done,” Mike explained. “She’s been studied by several different universities and they all admit, no one has given such accurate results in multiple tests.”

“Tests in what?” Richie asked.

“ESP, telepathy, clairvoyance, even astral projection,” Mike said, sounding terribly excited. “And she’s not the only one. She claims there are others like her out there.”

“That’s it,” Eddie groaned, rubbing at his eyes, “I’m going to bed. You and Mike have fun. I’ll handle the Tooth Fairy tonight since you’re so busy.”

Richie waved his hand distractedly as he squinted at the screen, clearly engrossed with the article. Eddie rolled his eyes, said good night to Mike, and walked out of their home office. He glanced at his watch. It was near midnight. He hadn’t stayed up this late on purpose in a long fucking time.

Quietly, he inched into Lydia’s room and reached into his pocket for his wallet. She was fast asleep, starfished on her bed, and Eddie allowed himself a relieved smile. He glanced at her nightstand, on which sat a piece of paper with the words FOR THE TOOTH FAIRY written on it in crayon with an arrow pointing to said tooth. Eddie was once again grateful he had had the forethought years ago to insist that the Tooth Fairy was too busy to go digging under pillows all night. Quickly, he slipped the dollar bill in the tooth’s place and, just a quickly, crept out of her room and down the hall.

He passed the office, and could hear Richie and Mike talking behind the closed door. His shoulders drooped, and he fought the desire to walk in there and demand Richie stop freaking himself out and come to bed. But Eddie had the sneaking suspicion Richie needed this, even if it was all bullshit.

And it had to be. It was bad enough they lived in a world where an ageless entity from space could terrorize children, erase their memories, and know their deepest fears. Eddie had to draw the line somewhere. Superheroes, magic, whatever, didn’t exist. His daughter was just that; his daughter. A little girl...with just an odd ability that had to have a somewhat rational explanation.

He opened his hand and gazed down at the tooth in his palm. He sighed, went to their closet, and found the leather travel bag. He

unzipped it, took out the tiny jar, unscrewed the top and placed the tooth in it. He returned the jar and bag back to the closet. He still found it a somewhat creepy practice to keep their daughter's baby teeth but Richie had insisted it was totally normal ("Besides, she can make a necklace out of them when she gets older, Eds!").

Eddie closed the closet door and turned towards the bed. It looked terribly inviting. He was about halfway to collapsing in it when the door creaked open, and a little face peeked through.

"Tess?" he said softly. He headed to the door and opened it fully. "What are you doing up, sweetheart? It's the middle of the night."

"Daddy," she whispered, her voice thin.

"What is it?" he asked, crouching down. "Did you have a bad dream?"

Her mouth fell open, and for a split second, Eddie thought she was about to vomit. Instead, she slumped, as if she was a marionette whose strings had just been cut. She remained standing, but her eyes dimmed and her body appeared boneless.

"Tess? Tess, answer me," Eddie said firmly, gripping her little arms as cold fear gripped his heart. "Tess, sweetheart, look at me. Answer me."

A great shuddering gasp escaped her and this time, her legs gave out fully. He gathered her into his arms and stood, repeating her name desperately.

"Daddy," she repeated, slurring slightly and her head lolling, "Papa's...get 'im."

"Tess, baby, just breathe with me and keep your eyes open, okay?" Eddie hurried to the office and kicked open the door. Richie jumped and immediately paled when he saw Tess languid in his arms.

"Oh, God, Tess, Tess," he gasped, rushing up to his husband and daughter. "Tess, look at me, please, kiddo."

"Get your car keys, and wake Lydia, we're taking her back to the hospital," Eddie said, shifting her in his arms.

Tess turned her bleary gaze to Richie. She reached out for him.

“Papa,” she mumbled.

“I’m right here, baby,” Richie said, his voice thick, taking her little face in his shaking hands.

“You...” she shuddered, blinked, and all at once, was their daughter again, her eyes clear and her voice strong. She burst into tears. “You almost flew away!” she wailed, as she all but launched herself out of Eddie’s arms and threw her own around Richie’s neck. Both men stumbled.

“Tess, I...” Richie looked at Eddie over her head, his own eyes wide and frightened. “I’m right here. It’s okay, kiddo, I’m right here. Are you alright? Does your head hurt or something?”

“Don’t fly away,” she begged through tears.

“Hold her,” Eddie said and maneuvered her into Richie’s arms. “I’m starting the car. We’re going to the hospital.”

“What was that?” Richie demanded over Tess’s sobs. “Another seizure?”

“I don’t know what it was,” Eddie said. “But I’m not waiting for another one.”

Pennywise couldn’t have been all-knowing, Eddie realized, because if it had, it would’ve shown Eddie and Richie this—their daughter sedated and lying, helpless and vulnerable, on the table before the yawning mouth of an MRI machine. This was worse than the leper or Paul Bunyan’s grinning razor-sharp teeth; worse than losing your childhood memories—because now, now they were really fucking helpless.

“It’ll take about ten days before we get the results back,” the neurologist explained. “And she’ll definitely be feeling the effects of the sedation afterwards. She should spend the next twenty-four hours resting.”

“Neither of us are working today,” Eddie muttered, clutching the shitty, cold coffee a nurse had given him earlier. He glanced back at Richie, but he was clearly lost inside his own head and not listening. He was sitting in a seat against the wall as they waited for the procedure to finish. Lydia—poor, patient Lydia who had been woken up in the middle of the night and thrilled by the sight of a dollar bill on her night stand, only to be told to put on her shoes, they were going to the hospital—was curled up, asleep in his lap, his jacket around her protectively.

Eddie sighed and rubbed at his forehead. The MRI technician smiled sympathetically at him.

“I know it seems to take forever,” he said, “but we’re nearly done.”

Eddie nodded. He was familiar with the process, having gone through it when the migraines became too much. Myra had insisted on second and third opinions. Eddie clenched his eyes shut and shook his head. The idea of Tess waking up after an MRI only to have Myra, or worse, his mother, waiting for her turned his stomach.

“How can she sleep through all that banging?” Richie muttered suddenly. Eddie remembered that Richie had never even seen an MRI machine until now.

“It’s loud, I know,” the technician said gently, “but between the earplugs and sedation, she doesn’t notice a thing.”

If he had said that to make them feel better, it only did the opposite. Eddie stood and stepped towards Richie, brushing his husband’s hair off his forehead.

“You need a haircut,” he muttered.

Richie glanced up and somehow, smiled.

“That’s the least of what I need right now,” he sighed.

Eddie leaned down and kissed the top of his head, uncaring that the technician was less than three feet away. Richie smiled again and for a moment, Eddie thought that if he could keep Richie smiling, then maybe they could get through this.

Recovery rooms had always been Eddie's least favorite part of a hospital. He hated the waiting, the fact that you were trapped with other patients, that you had virtually no privacy. But now, he especially hated that they were surrounded by other children and their families, all nervous and on-edge.

Tess was one of the lucky ones. She hadn't gone through surgery, but the doctor still wanted her to sufficiently recoup from the sedation before she went home. Richie and Eddie were miserable.

Eddie sighed and shifted Lydia, still sleeping, in his arms. Richie had needed a break and also desperately wanted to hold Tess's hand as she slept. Eddie remembered how despondent he had been when he had woken up after surgery in Derry, only to discover he was the one patient in the recovery room without any visitors waiting for him. It was only later that he discovered the doctors had not allowed a single visitor in, seeing as they were not family and not listed as an emergency contact. Luckily, Mike knew one of the nurses, and when Eddie was transferred back to his own room, they were all there, beaming at him—except for Richie, who still looked terrified, as if certain he was gazing at a mirage.

"She looks so tiny," Richie suddenly whispered.

Eddie blinked and turned his gaze to his youngest daughter, her little chest rising and falling steadily. He nodded.

"Even tinier than when we first got her," he agreed.

"She was underweight," Richie continued, his thumb running over her little hand. "Remember how light she was?"

Eddie nodded again and rested his cheek on the top of Lydia's head. He closed his eyes and immediately saw Tess in their doorway, hours earlier. He sighed.

"She looked like you," he whispered. Richie turned towards him, confusion on his face. "During her seizure tonight. She looked like you when you were caught..." he lowered his voice, "when you were

in the deadlights.”

Richie swallowed.

“Maybe that’s what she saw,” he replied quietly.

“The deadlights?”

“No, me,” Richie said, reaching with his other hand to stroke Tess’s hair. “She said, don’t fly away. Maybe she saw me in the deadlights, too.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Eddie noticed movement. He glanced over, and spotted a nurse hovering across the room, who quickly looked away. Eddie frowned. He doubted the nurse could overhear them, but he felt nervousness form in the pit of his stomach. Perhaps he was a fan of Richie’s, but surely no nurse would dare approach him in a recovery room, right?

“Eddie, that girl Mike told us about,” Richie whispered, his eyes wide, “I think you should read what he sent.”

“Rich, not now, please.”

“It sounds like...like this is real. She’s seeing things from before she was born. How is that possible?”

Eddie spotted the nurse again, who was making quite a show of reading a chart a few beds away. Eddie frowned.

“Can we at least wait for the MRI results before we jump to conclusions?” he begged.

Richie followed his gaze and spotted the hovering nurse, too. He swallowed and looked back down at their sleeping daughter.

“Alright, Eds,” he sighed. “Whatever you say.”

The next ten days went by in a blur of family visits and constant check-ins from the Losers. Apparently when a small child gets her

brain scanned, it's all hands on deck. Richie's parents and sister babysat, brought food, and distracted the girls while Eddie and Richie walked around in a daze, waiting for the results that could potentially change their lives.

Mike Facetimed everyday, never bringing up any of his research, but simply listening. Bill, stuck in Europe with limited wifi on a movie shoot, sent goofy videos and uplifting emails when he could. Bev called multiple times a day and Ben fucking flew in, because he was just that sort of kind-hearted bastard.

"Bev can't get away from work until Sunday," he explained gently. The results were due to come in on Friday. "She wanted to be here."

"It's fine," Richie said, faking a smile. "You guys are acting like this is a wedding. We're just getting a bunch of paperwork telling us what the fuck is going on in our daughter's brain. No big deal."

Ben offered one of his patented *You're making jokes about being sad and that's sad* faces and Richie just shrugged.

"We're glad you're here," Eddie admitted softly. "Besides, Lydia's thrilled."

"That's true," Richie said, "Lyds loves you, Ben. I think she wants you and Bev to adopt her."

Ben laughed gently and ran a hand through his hair.

"Tess still needs to warm up to me," he said.

"Tess still needs to warm up to me," Richie shot back.

Eddie rolled his eyes.

"She adores you, Rich," he said, brewing another pot of coffee. "She even lets you read to her now."

"Yeah, Berenstain Bears, not Dr. Seuss," Richie muttered. "I hate the fucking Berenstain Bears."

Ben laughed and squeezed Richie's shoulder affectionately.

“Having kids seems a lot more complicated than I thought,” he admitted.

“Trust me, man, you have no idea,” Richie said, scrubbing his hand over his face.

Friday came in a blink. Ben and Richie’s sister Sarah watched the girls while Richie and Eddie went to get the results. They drove together in tense silence, waited in the waiting room silently, and when they were finally called into the office, still said very little.

Later, Eddie would realize that for something that caused such overwhelming anxiety for so long, it was all very anticlimactic. The results showed nothing in Tess’s brain. Once again, the doctor insisted there was no physical reason for her apparent seizures. It was good news...right?

As they walked out, stunned and exhausted, both men were lost in their own thoughts. Eddie felt weak with relief but he still couldn’t get the image of his daughter in that MRI machine. Time to make another appointment with his therapist, he figured.

By the time he reached the door, he suddenly realized Richie was not beside him. He turned around and spotted Richie down the hall, hurrying after him.

“Where were you?” Eddie asked tiredly.

“Nowhere, nothing,” Richie said quickly. “Let’s go home.”

“Rich?”

“I wanna see the girls,” Richie continued, rushing through the doors.

Eddie sighed and shook his head, following his husband.

“But that’s good news!” Ben exclaimed when they got home. “Isn’t it?”

"It is," Eddie said, running a hand through his hair. "I mean, she has nothing physically wrong in her brain so thank God. But we still don't have clear answers."

Sarah frowned and shook her head.

"There has to be one," she insisted. "Did they talk about medication or anything?"

"A bit," Eddie sighed. "I just...something about it feels wrong. I can't explain it."

"What does Richie think?" Ben asked.

"I...I don't know," Eddie admitted.

"Where is Richie?" Sarah asked, suddenly looking around her. She peeked into the living room where Lydia was playing with the Wii. "Lyds, did you see where your dad went?"

"I think he's in Tess's room," she answered. "Aunt Sarah, it's your turn to play. You promised."

"I know but—"

"Please," Lydia begged, putting on her best puppy dog eyes.

Sarah sighed but smiled affectionately. "Duty calls," she said, and walked into the living room.

"I should go check on Richie," Eddie said tiredly.

"Sure," Ben said before placing his arm on Eddie's shoulder. "Listen, you don't have to tell me anything you don't want to, but is there something else going on? Like, you and Richie don't seem...yourselves."

Eddie tried to offer a smile but Ben saw right through it. He looked genuinely concerned and Eddie had to admit, it was nice to have someone else worry, too.

"It's fine, we're just...figuring this out," he admitted softly. "I'll be

right back.”

He walked down the hall and knocked on Tess’s half-opened door. He peeked in. Richie was sitting on her bed with Tess on his knee, speaking quietly to her.

“You two okay?” he asked.

“Eds, come here,” Richie said quickly. “And close the door.”

Eddie did so with a sense of unease. He stepped towards the bed and gazed down at his husband and daughter expectantly. Richie turned back to Tess.

“Now, kiddo, tell Daddy what you told me,” he said gently. “Just the same.”

“Okay,” Tess said, shrugging as she looked up at Eddie. ““Member when I fell down?”

Eddie huffed a laugh.

“Yes, I definitely remember that, sweetheart,” he said.

“Well,” Tess began, fiddling with the hem of her shirt, “I fell because Papa fell and it hurted.”

“Papa fell?”

She nodded vigorously.

“Yep, he was flying,” she said. She turned back to Richie. “How come you don’t fly at home?”

Richie shook his head.

“Because I can’t really fly,” he admitted.

“But you did in the cave.”

“I wasn’t flying,” Richie explained gently. “I was floating.”

A wave of nausea rolled in Eddie’s stomach.

“Richie, stop this,” he insisted.

“Wait, listen, go on, Tess. Tell Daddy the rest.”

“Daddy saved you,” she said, shrugging. “And then Daddy got hurt. And you was sad but now it’s okay.”

“Yes, it’s all okay now,” Richie agreed, kissing her on her forehead. “Why did Daddy float?”

“Cause of the light. Aunt Bev saw it, too,” she answered nonchalantly. “Can I have a snack?”

“Of course you can,” Richie said happily, hugging her tightly before placing her on her feet. “Go on, Aunt Sarah and Uncle Ben are in the kitchen.”

She rushed out. Richie and Eddie stared at one another.

“You can’t deny it, Eds,” Richie said, his voice oddly light. “She sees our past. I don’t know how or why, but she does.”

Eddie swallowed and suddenly realized his hands were shaking. He closed them into fists.

“It?” he whispered.

Richie shook his head.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “This is something else. Like something you’re born with.”

“Richie...”

“And earlier, at the hospital, a nurse stopped me,” he said, standing and reaching into his pocket. “He was in the recovery room with us last week. I saw him looking over at us and I thought he was just being a dick but he heard us. He stopped me on our way out today and gave me this.”

He pulled a crumpled piece of paper out and handed it to Eddie. Eddie looked down at an unfamiliar name.

“What’s this supposed to be?” he asked.

“He said he used to work with this guy, he has what Tess has,” Richie said excitedly.

“For fuck’s sake,” Eddie sighed. “This could just be a crazy person. That nurse could be a crazy person.”

“His name is in one of the articles Mike sent us,” Richie insisted. “About that girl.”

“And? What are we supposed to do about it?”

“We can reach out to them.”

“No fucking way,” Eddie said, raising his voice in shock. “You wanna read articles or look up theories on the Internet, fucking fine, but there is no way we are opening ourselves to some fucking lunatics. Especially when it comes to our daughter.”

“I’m not saying we introduce Tess to them, I’m saying we ask some questions.”

“Absolutely not,” Eddie hissed.

“So what do you want to do?” Richie asked angrily. “Wait around until this happens again? Throw some meds at her and hope for the best?”

Eddie threw his hands up and turned away.

“This is crazy, Rich, totally fucking crazy,” he gasped.

“Eds—”

A knock at the door. Ben stuck his head in.

“You guys want lunch or something?” Ben asked gently. “Tess and Lyds are hungry.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Richie said, taking a deep breath. “We’ll be right there.”

He nodded, gave a penetrating look at his two friends, and left. Richie stood and gazed down at Eddie, his eyes soft. He took Eddie's face in his hands, caressing his cheekbones with his thumbs.

"We need to figure this out," he whispered, "and I can't do it alone."

Eddie sighed, closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and nodded. He didn't see Richie smile but he felt it in his kiss.

Life went back to normal—or as normal as it ever was in the Tozier household. Bev still offered to fly out but there wasn't any point, so after thanking him profusely and offering to visit soon, Richie and Eddie sent Ben back home to his wife. He looked oddly reluctant to leave, but he hugged his two friends tightly and told them he loved them before his flight. Eddie caught Richie blinking rapidly before turning away.

Sarah still visited often, along with Richie's mother, but they had their own responsibilities, too. And, as far as the medical world as concerned, Tess was physically fine.

Soon, they had less than a week until the new school year, and the Tozier family was busy. Last minute supplies had to be bought, schedules finalized, Tess reassured constantly about the safety and fun of preschool, and teachers informed about her seizures. The preschool took the information well, and assured them that they had plenty of experience with children with epilepsy. Richie and Eddie considered explaining that Tess did not have that, but let it go. Perhaps it was easier to pretend she had an ordinary diagnosis.

Lydia and Tess's first days started together and, in an effort to make the preschool drop off as easy and meltdown-free as possible, Richie volunteered to take Tess alone. She'd still freak out but it wouldn't be as violent if Eddie was there, they figured. Eddie agreed reluctantly. He hated the idea of his daughter breaking down at the front steps of the preschool, but he hated the idea of missing her first day even more.

"I'll film everything," Richie promised. "It's only for half a day,

anyway.”

Eddie nodded and finished packing her snacks and blanket. Lydia was practically vibrating with excitement, showing off her back to school outfits and re-organizing her Batman backpack. She was, both men had to admit, better at distracting and empowering Tess than they were. She spent their last day of summer vacation going on and on about the excitement of school, of how much fun she has with her friends and the nice teachers, and when Tess starts kindergarten next year, she'll just love it.

Tess listened carefully and asked many questions. Lydia, always a fan of being in charge and all-knowing, was in her element. Eddie smiled and felt his heart twist as he watched his two daughters. Perhaps everything will be okay, he thought hopefully.

That night, he and Richie helped the girls wash up, change into their pjs, lay out their first day clothes, and climb into bed. Lydia needed very little encouragement and simply kissed them both good night before asking for her copy of *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*, and promising not to stay up late reading. They left her room, content in the knowledge that Lydia was quite fearless and adept at rolling with the punches.

In their younger daughter's room, Richie tucked Tess into her bed, her night light on and her eyes heavy. Eddie brushed her hair from her face and she smiled sleepily.

“You're going to have a great day tomorrow,” he said gently.

“Yeah, you're going to have so much fun,” Richie agreed. “I can't wait to hear all about it.”

Tess yawned.

“Yep,” she said, “a good day.”

“And you're so smart and brave,” Richie continued. “You're gonna blow everyone away tomorrow.”

“I know,” Tess replied, rubbing at her eye with the back of her hand. “‘M not scared. ‘M not scared of anything anymore.”

“Good,” Eddie said, impressed. Lydia should become a motivational speaker, he thought briefly. “You have nothing to be afraid of.”

“Nope,” Tess replied. “The nice girl showed me.”

Unease, like a blanket, fell over Richie and Eddie. They glanced at one another, both frozen. Richie licked his lips and swallowed before asking, “What girl?”

“The girl who visited me,” she yawned. “She showed me lots.”

“What did she show you?” Eddie whispered, terrified of the answer.

“Magic,” Tess replied, closing her eyes. “She says I’m magic, too.”

“Tess...”

She smiled as her breathing slowly evened out, and they knew she was falling asleep.

“She says I shine like her,” Tess whispered.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

8. Visions

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie begins to understand his daughter a bit more and reaches out for help.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood. These chapters are not necessarily in chronological order and there will be time jumps. I just hope it's not too confusing or weird.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

There were a lot of things Richie liked about parenthood.

He liked seeing the world through his children's eyes and experiencing things he had long dismissed as if for the first time (watching Lydia watch Star Wars was better than watching it for the first time as a kid). He liked the structure that came with parenting. It put his anxiety in check and, like the weighted blanket Eddie had given him on their first Christmas, calmed and comforted him.

He liked making his children laugh—loved it, in fact. Making Lydia and Tess laugh was better than making an audience in a thousand-seat theater laugh. And he liked laughing with his children, and was particularly fond of their strange, nonsensical jokes.

He liked the fact that though people complained about how it hard it was to raise kids today, what with all the rampant technology and kids growing up too fast, he was raising his girls in a time and place where having two dads wasn't that weird. Sure, most kids they knew

didn't have same-sex parents but very few people actually gave a shit about it. It warmed Richie's heart.

Finally, he liked waking up with the knowledge that he truly wasn't alone anymore, that there were people who loved him unconditionally.

Of course, there were things he didn't like about parenthood. He wasn't crazy about punishments, though he was reluctant to just let Eddie handle those for fear of their kids determining that one parent was the nice one versus the mean one. He also didn't like extracurricular activities, but he had the sneaking suspicion Tess wouldn't be interested in as many as her sister was.

He hated germs and the knowledge that if one kid coughed, the entire house was under quarantine. When he found himself wiping down all the doorknobs with disinfectant wipes, he realized all his teasing of Eddie was unfounded. He had turned into Mrs. K. Gross.

He also had a very low tolerance for other parents. Most of them were entitled shitsheads who raised snotty-nosed idiots that ran around without any boundaries or consequences. Eddie always teased him for preening so obviously whenever they were complimented for how polite and well-mannered their daughters were in public. Whatever, a victory is a victory.

And finally, Richie definitely did not like how little time parenting left for him and Eddie. He wasn't stupid, he knew having a family would put their romantic life on the back burner a bit but sometimes, it got rough. Sometimes he just wanted a date night without worrying about the kids with their babysitter but it wasn't like he could shut off his brain. And yeah, when Bev and Ben flew down, spur of the moment, to visit Mike and his new girlfriend in the Florida Keys, he was a little bit jealous. But then Lydia and Tess had asked for help with building a blanket fort in the living room and he realized, this isn't so bad.

So no, Richie didn't regret having kids with Eddie. He loved his daughters and couldn't imagine life without them. And perhaps it was because of what happened in Derry that made Richie so determined that nothing would threaten his girls.

And if that meant hours of research and more long nights reading than he had done while in college, then so be it. If it meant he woke up every morning exhausted because he had been up half the night digging through forums and links and hints on the internet, whatever. The only thing that irked him about it was the worried looks Eddie sometimes shot his way. But who cares? Tess needed answers.

And of course, the name scratched on the piece of paper the nurse had given him gave no real leads. Whoever this was had no social media presence, not even a LinkedIn. Was this guy a fucking 90-year-old? Even they had Facebooks, at least.

Eddie turned over in bed and groaning, blinking slowly.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he grumbled, squinting against the light of Richie’s iPad which, to be fair, was on the lowest setting.

“Reading,” Richie replied. “Go back to sleep.”

“You need to go to sleep to begin with,” Eddie yawned. “What fucking time is it?”

Richie glanced at the time at the top right corner of the screen and winced.

“1:32,” he admitted.

“What the fuck,” Eddie said, reaching for his iPad. “That’s enough.”

“Eds, no, wait—”

“It’ll be there when you use it tomorrow morning,” Eddie replied, taking the iPad out of his hands and closing the cover. He placed it on the nightstand and wrapped his arm around Richie’s middle, causing Richie to wince once again. He had definitely gained some weight but stress-eating in the middle of the night will do that to a middle-aged man.

“Come on, lay down,” Eddie said softly. “Relax.”

“I can’t.”

Eddie sighed and maneuvered his head onto Richie's chest.

"Tess has been fine," he admitted gently. "No seizures, no bad dreams, no mentioning of anything out of our past for over a week. You can relax for one night, Rich."

Richie swallowed and gazed up at the ceiling. He knew Eddie could easily feel his heart beating rapidly and he wondered, not for the first time, just how much he frustrated his husband. Suddenly, Eddie turned his head and kissed Richie's chest, right above his heart. Richie looked down at him and was suddenly struck with the thought of how amazing it was to be laying here, in this house, with Eddie in his arms.

"Come on, love," Eddie whispered, "try to get some rest with me, hm?"

Richie nodded and laid back.

"Alright," he said gently. "Whatever you say, Eds."

Pulling up to the preschool in the early afternoon always filled Richie with relief. Not for the first time, he reflected on how grateful he was that in their school district, kindergarten was also only a half-day. He had no idea how he would handle Tess going into first grade and having both girls gone all fucking day, the house empty and silent. What the fuck was he gonna do with his time?

Richie parked the car and stepped out, his hands in his pockets. He could write more, he guessed, maybe even take Eddie's advice and try his hand at essays ("You could be the next David Sedaris, Rich," Eddie had insisted one day. Richie thought he was being a bit too kind but whatever).

Maybe he'd start hanging out with those stay-at-home moms who spend their free time drinking white wine, going to Zumba, and annoying their friends with pyramid schemes. He could charm his way into that group, couldn't he?

Richie opened the door to the preschool and was greeted by the

sound of children playing, a few whining, one crying, and teachers trying to maintain a semblance of order. He greeted one or two that he knew, along with saying hi to a couple kids from the neighborhood before spotting Tess, pouting in a seat.

“Hey, kiddo,” he said happily. “What’s going on?”

She said nothing, just looked down at her hands as one teacher, Miss Lisa, approached the two of them.

“Do you want to tell your dad what color you got today?” she asked Tess pointedly.

Richie frowned. The fucking color system. Tess always had green next to her name but from the look on her face plus the tone of Miss Lisa’s voice, he knew things were bad.

“What color did you get?” he asked gently.

Tess merely looked away and wrapped her arms around her knees. He turned toward the teacher.

“Yellow,” she replied, “for not listening and talking back.”

Richie raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“That doesn’t sound like you, Tess,” he said. He crouched down to her level. “What’s going on? Why didn’t you listen?” She remained silent, still avoiding her father’s gaze. “Tess, look at me.”

She glanced over and bit her lip before looking back down at her lap. She shrugged once. Richie sighed and straightened.

“Go get your jacket and backpack. We’ll talk about this at home,” he said. She took off for her cubby. He turned back to the teacher. “Sorry about that.”

“It’s alright,” she said, “all kids have days like this. It was just surprising from Tess, that’s all.”

Richie nodded and ran a hand through his hair.

"I'll talk to her," he offered lamely.

Miss Lisa nodded and then took a step closer to Richie, lowering her voice.

"Does Tess talk about her imaginary friend at home?" she asked.

Richie froze, and he briefly wondered if she could tell that the rictus smile on his face was false.

"Sometimes," he breathed.

She nodded.

"That's what the issue was today," she said. "She was too busy playing with her imaginary friend to listen and then talked back when we tried to get her to focus. She's quite protective of this friend."

"Right."

She must've thought Richie was upset because she quickly explained, "Most of the kids here have imaginary friends, it's totally normal. It's just that when they use them as an excuse to break the rules, we have an issue."

"Of course," Richie said blankly.

Miss Lisa smiled reassuringly as Tess arrived with her jacket and backpack and a pout still on her face.

"Come on, kiddo," Richie said, leaning toward to take her hand. "Say goodbye and apologize."

"Bye, Miss Lisa," she muttered, looking down at her shoes. "Sorry."

"Thank you, Tess," the teacher replied gently. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Richie and Tess walked out of the preschool silently.

He sat at the kitchen table beside his daughter. She was in a much better mood now that she was home and eating apple slices coated in peanut butter. Richie took a moment to memorize how content she looked before opening his mouth.

“Listen, kiddo, I gotta ask, why weren’t you paying attention in school today?”

Tess shrugged and munched on another slice.

“You know you’re not supposed to do that,” he continued. “And you’re such a good student. You know better.”

She frowned briefly and nodded. Richie wiped a hand over his face as he sighed. Fuck, this was harder than he thought.

“Your job at school is to listen to the teachers,” he explained, feeling like the world’s biggest hypocrite, positive that when he tells this story to his parents, they’ll laugh for hours. “You know that. And you don’t talk back. That’s not like you at all.”

“I know,” Tess mumbled, sounding very near tears and sending a stab through Richie’s heart.

“Baby, you’re not in trouble,” he said quickly. “You just...learned a lesson today, right?”

She nodded and sniffed.

“Oh, come here,” he murmured, immediately taking her into his arms and pulling her onto his lap. He kissed the top of her head repeatedly. “It’s okay, kiddo. You had an off day. It happens to everyone. Even me.”

“Yeah?” she asked, muffled from hiding her face in his chest.

“Yeah,” Richie insisted. “I have them all the time.”

She turned her head and rested it against her father’s heart. Richie tightened his arms around her and allowed himself some time to just enjoy. But he had to find out more.

"Tess, baby," he said softly, "do you have an imaginary friend?"

She hesitated every so slightly before nodded.

"She's real," she insisted.

"I know," Richie replied, swallowing. "What's her name."

"Abracadabra," she admitted after a moment's pause. Richie frowned. Sounded like a regular imaginary friend's name. Maybe this had nothing to do with...everything else.

"Sounds cool," he said, trying to keep his voice light. "Do you guys play together a lot?"

"No, only sometimes."

"But you guys played today?"

"Yeah," Tess admitted, wiping at her nose. "She only stayed for a little."

"What do you guys like to play?"

Tess shrugged.

"She just shows me stuff."

Richie tightened his grip on his daughter.

"Like what?" he whispered.

"My shine."

"Shine? What's that?"

Tess sat back in her father's lap and gazed up at him, confused.

"My magic," she replied as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Your magic that...helps you see things? Like me and Daddy as little boys?" Richie asked slowly.

She nodded.

“What does she show you?”

Tess hesitated, then tilted her head to the side, and raised one hand to rest along her father’s face. All at once, the air rushed out of Richie’s lungs, as if he was in a vacuum. He was no longer in their kitchen, but everywhere at once, flashes of memories and images swirling past his eyes like trees when you speed down the highway.

He caught glimpses of himself as a child, Eddie with his broken arm, Bowers shouting at him in the arcade, stepping on stage and bombing, Edding kissing Myra in City Hall, Neibolt collapsing, Eddie pale and coughing up blood, screams and tears and laughter, Tess as a baby—before he had ever known her, Lydia pushing her sister to the ground in frustration, Richie and Eddie arguing—unaware that both girls could hear them, the Losers overwhelming Tess with their hugs and kisses when they first met her, Richie floating, the MRI machine. All of it streamed past in a dizzying smear of color and sound until, like water in a drain, it circled into a box and abruptly, a hand came down and slammed it shut.

Richie blinked. He was back in his kitchen with his daughter in his arms, her hands folded delicately in her lap.

He gasped, his chest heaving, tears running down his face. He gazed down, slack-jawed, at his daughter, who suddenly looked so much older and wiser beyond her four years.

“She shows me how to stop it,” she said plainly.

“Mikey, I need your help,” Richie said quickly, barely able to catch his breath.

“What? What is it? Are you okay?” Mike responded just as quickly.

“I’m fine, we’re all fine,” Richie replied. “I just need your help in doing some research.”

Mike hesitated. Richie bit his lip and tightened his grip on the phone.

"Is this about Tess?" Mike finally asked.

"Yeah."

"Richie, I don't think this is a good idea," Mike admitted softly. "I mean, I've been doing some thinking and maybe Eddie's right. Maybe this is all crazy."

"It's not, though," Richie said firmly. "It's not because I fucking saw it."

"Saw what?"

"Everything," he blurted out. "Her ability to see things that have happened fucking years ago. I saw it. She showed me."

"How?" Mike asked and Richie could just picture the cautiously curious look on his face.

"She fucking put her hand on my face and, I don't know, transferred it," he said, realizing quickly how insane he sounded. "I'm telling you the truth."

Mike was silent once again but Richie didn't have time for it.

"I need your help finding the girl in the articles you sent me," he continued. "They protected her identity but I need to find her."

"Richie, how the hell am I supposed to—"

"I don't know, but that's what you do, right? Research," Richie reminded him.

Mike sighed.

"And what are you gonna do *if* I find her real name and info?" he asked tentatively.

"Talk to her," Richie said. "I'm not gonna show up at her house but maybe I could at least email her or something."

"Rich, I think you're working yourself up a bit," Mike said gently.

“No shit I am,” Richie exclaimed. “Mikey, this is real. And I need your help. Please. For my daughter’s sake.”

“Oh, for fuck...” Mike groaned. “Why’d you have to go and say that?”

“Please.”

“Alright, alright,” Mike sighed. “I’ll do some digging but I make no guarantees.”

“Yes, thank you so much, man. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Rich.”

Richie jumped when he heard the front door open and close and both girls rush to greet Eddie with squeals of “Daddy!” He turned back to the stove and began stirring the pasta for no apparent reason. Stay calm.

Eddie walked into the kitchen, loosening his tie and smiled.

“Hey, babe,” he greeted, stepping up to Richie to kiss him on the cheek, “how are you doing?”

“Fine,” Richie answered quickly. “You?”

“Tired, but what else is new,” Eddie said. “The girls have a good day?”

“Yeah, fine,” Richie lied. The water in the pot suddenly boiled over, splashing onto his hand. He hissed and snatched his hand back.

“Oh, Rich,” Eddie sighed, grasping his wrist and rushing him to the sink and running cool water over Richie’s hand.

“I’m fine,” Richie said, wincing. “Lower the heat on the stove, would ya?”

Eddie nodded and reluctantly let go of Richie’s hand to lower the burner.

“Do you want some ice?” he asked.

“No, I’m fine. Not a big deal,” Richie said quickly, turning off the water.

“Rich, I think you should hold some ice on it,” Eddie insisted, gazing at the angry burn on his hand.

“I said I’m fine,” Richie repeated, drying his hand on a dishtowel and trying not to wince at the pain.

Eddie gazed at him, a hurt look on his face.

“Are you okay?” he asked quietly. “You seem jumpy. Did something happen? Something with Tess?”

“Nothing happened,” Richie lied again. “I’m just tired and headachey.”

“Okay,” Eddie said slowly. He turned towards the cabinet where they kept the first aid kit and took out a bottle of ibuprofen. He poured two in his hand and handed them to Richie. “Take this for your hand and your headache. I’m gonna go take a shower before dinner, alright?”

“Fine,” Richie said, swallowing the pills dry. He turned away as Eddie walked out of the kitchen.

Richie hated lying to Eddie. He also didn’t think he was particularly good at it, which was quite funny considering he had lied all throughout his career and most of his adulthood. You’d think he’d have this down perfectly but now, lying to Eddie’s face, it sucked. He didn’t mention what Tess had showed him and probably wouldn’t have discussed her behavior at preschool but they were somehow raising two oddly honest children and she blurted it out at dinner.

“How was school today, girls?” Eddie asked as he served them both.

“Okay,” Lydia said, more interested in her food than anything else.

"I got yellow today," Tess admitted sadly.

Richie flinched as he watched Eddie try to decipher just what on earth she meant by that cryptic statement before he remembered.

"Oh," he said, mildly confused, "why's that, sweetheart? You're always on green."

Tess shrugged and looked down at her plate of spaghetti sourly.

"Had some trouble listening today," Richie said quickly. "I talked to her already."

"I see," Eddie said, nodding. "Did the teachers and Papa explain why it's important to pay attention?"

"Yes," she sighed.

"I always pay attention," Lydia pointed out.

"I know you do," Eddie replied before glancing back at his youngest. "You okay, Tess?"

She nodded and gazed up at her father as if wanting to say more.

"I think she's just embarrassed," Richie said suddenly.

Eddie frowned but dropped the subject as Tess began eating. Richie relaxed, guilt nevertheless rising in his throat.

Later that night, as they laid side by side in bed, Richie wondered if he should just tell everything to Eddie—about Tess's imaginary friend, the visions he saw, asking Mike for help. What's the big deal? The worst he could say was that he was crazy...again.

Suddenly, Eddie reached for his hand and held it gently in the dark.

"How's the burn?" he asked softly.

"Fine," Richie said blankly, having completely forgotten about it.

Eddie brought his hand to his lips and kissed it gently in the general area of the burn before trailing kisses up Richie's arm in an exaggerated imitation of Gomez Addams. Normally, Richie would laugh, but this time, he just pulled it out of Eddie's grasp.

"Not now," he sighed, staring up at the ceiling. He could feel Eddie's eyes on him and just knew they probably looked ever sadder than usual.

"What's going on, Rich?" Eddie implored. "You've been weird all evening."

"Nothing's going on," Richie lied again. "I just got a lot of things on my mind."

"So tell me about them," Eddie asked, rolling onto his side to fully face his husband. "That's what spouses are supposed to do. Share issues."

"You do that with Myra?" Richie snapped, horrified even as the words tumbled out of his mouth.

Eddie tensed and stared at him, shock written plainly on his face.

"Fuck you, Richie Tozier," Eddie said after a moment's pause. "I don't know what the fuck your problem is but fuck you. I haven't done shit to you."

He rolled over onto his side, away from Richie, and pulled the blankets up over his shoulders. Richie clenched his eyes shut and took a deep breath, wondering just what the fuck was his problem.

The email wasn't very long.

I can't find the girl from all those studies. They did a solid job protecting her identity. But I did find more about the guy she mentioned as her mentor a couple times in the articles. It is the same name that nurse gave you. I recognized it from a story an old-timer once told me back in Derry. I did some digging and found out that he works in a hospice in New Hampshire. The number's below. I hope this helps.

Richie typed the number into his phone, his thumb hovering over the call button. He took a deep breath and put his phone down. He turned his gaze to the laptop screen, Mike's email staring back at him.

If he called, he could possibly get the answers he needed for Tess. Or he could literally be opening Pandora's box, if the vision she had showed him had any truth to it. He dropped his face into his hands and groaned and before he could second-guess himself, he picked up the phone and called the number.

Richie's stomach was ice as it rang several times and he was about to hang up when a cheery voice answered, thanking him for calling the hospice and asking where to direct his call. Richie licked his lips and opened his mouth.

"Dan Torrance, please," Richie said.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

9. Visions II

Summary for the Chapter:

Eddie sees what his daughter is capable of.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

They say don't go to bed angry.

That's fine and all but what happens if you're already in bed? What if you wake up angry? What then?

In Eddie's case, he woke up an hour earlier than necessary, glanced at Richie—curled up tight on his side of the bed, facing the wall—frowned, and got up. He washed, dressed, snuck into both of his daughters' rooms to kiss them as they slept, and headed off to work. He had an hour to spare so he treated himself to eating breakfast at their favorite local diner. He felt queasy for the rest of the day.

He worked, said hello to his co-workers, argued with clients on the phone, sat through a meeting that should have been an email, ate lunch at his desk, absently scrolled through Bev's Instagram, and left at precisely five o'clock. From his window, he could see that the day was overcast and rainy, and felt oddly satisfied that it matched his feelings.

When he arrived home, he sat in the driveway for several long moments, gathering his thoughts. The lights were on and he knew the girls were probably playing in the living room while waiting for Richie to finish cooking dinner. He had no idea what to expect from

his husband when he walked through the door but he knew he wouldn't say anything in front of the girls.

He sighed, rubbed at his tired eyes, and got out of the car. Whatever was bothering Richie, they could figure it out. They survived Derry in '89, Derry in 2016, several trips to the hospital with their daughter—they could handle anything. He briefly wondered if Richie's attitude was due to his old complaint that he spent too much time at work but that couldn't be it. He hadn't stayed late for weeks and was always home before six.

Perhaps he was still worried about Tess. Eddie got it, he was worried, too, but she seemed to be doing so much better and the tests had cleared her physically so what could they do? Act like his mother and fret and nag and suffocate their children? No, he had promised himself he would never be like as a parent and he wasn't going to start now.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped out of the car and barely had time to lock it before the front door slammed open and Richie rushed out, shouting his name. Eddie's heart froze and his stomach clenched, fear coursing through his veins.

"Wha—the girls. Are they okay, what's going on?" he managed to stammer out before Richie grasped him by the wrist. He blinked when he realized Richie wasn't upset or terrified...he looked excited.

"It's real, it's all real," he exclaimed. "I talked to him. And Tess showed me. She's not sick. It's real."

"What?" Eddie gasped. "What are you talking about?"

"Eddie, she has these...these abilities, and we're not crazy. He told me!"

"Who?"

"The man from those articles Mikey sent us. I found him! Well, Mikey found him and I called him today and we spoke for hours. Eddie..." Richie grasped Eddie by the shoulders, and, for the first time in weeks, looked genuinely happy, "those weren't seizures. She's fine.

She's perfectly fine. She's just powerful."

Eddie stared, slack-jawed, at his husband. His mind was running in circles, trying desperately to catch up to Richie's seemingly nonsensical words.

"Richie, I—"

"Come on," and Richie turned, still grasping Eddie's wrist, and pulled him to their front door. "I almost called you to come home earlier but I thought you were still angry at me."

"Well, I was, I mean, I am."

"I know, I'm sorry," Richie said quickly, shooting him an apologetic look over his shoulder. "But we'll talk about that later. I have to show you this."

"Show me what?" Eddie demanded, thoroughly confused.

"Tess!" Richie called as they entered their home. "Tess, come here, baby."

He pulled Eddie into the living room, where Tess was coloring while her sister danced along to the saccharine song playing on the TV. Tess looked up and smiled.

"Hi, Daddy," she said happily.

"Hi, Daddy," Lydia gasped in between very high kicks.

"Hey, girls," Eddie managed to get out before Richie knelt down in front of Tess.

"Kiddo, I need you to do me a favor," he said breathlessly. Tess gazed up at him curiously. "I need you to show Daddy what you showed me." She scrunched up her face in confusion. "Show him what Abracadabra showed you."

"Oh," she said, biting her lip. "I don't know."

"Who's Abracadabra?" Eddie asked, bewildered.

"Her imaginary friend," Lydia replied, now doing something that resembled frantic jumping jacks.

"She's real!" Tess insisted.

"Is not," Lydia replied.

"Is too!"

"Is not!"

"Okay, okay, no fighting," Richie broke in. "Tess, please, show Daddy."

She hesitated again, turning her worried gaze to Eddie.

"What's wrong?" Richie asked. "You don't want to show him?" Tess shook her head. "Why not?"

She bit her lip again before leaning towards Richie, bringing her hand to her mouth as she whispered in his ear. He listened carefully and then straightened when she finished.

"Oh, Tess, you don't have to worry about that," he said gently.

"What is it?" Eddie asked, still thoroughly confused.

"She thinks if she shows you, you'll get upset," Richie explained.

"I don't even know what you want her to show me," Eddie replied, exasperated before turning towards his daughter. "But I won't get upset, whatever it is. I promise."

Tess looked doubtful as she muttered something under breath.

"What's that, kiddo?" Richie asked.

"I said I don't wanna hurt his feelings," she repeated, a nervous expression on her face.

Eddie's heart clenched again and he tried to smile reassuringly.

"Sweetheart, you can never hurt my feelings, it's alright," he insisted.

“So just show me whatever Daddy wants me to see so we can go in and eat dinner.”

“Oh,” Richie said suddenly, a sheepish look on his face, “I sorta forgot to actually cook dinner.” He turned towards his daughters. “How about this? Tess, you show him and we’ll order pizza!”

Both girls shouted with delight and Eddie was about to admonish Richie for bribing them when Tess abruptly rested a hand on the side of his face and suddenly, Eddie was somewhere else. He was half-conscious of the fact that he wasn’t breathing but instead of being terrified, he was astonished to discover he actually didn’t need to breathe at all.

Perhaps he was in freefall or maybe the sights and sounds around him were tangible objects that could fly but either way, he tried desperately to make sense of what was surrounding him. His father—always looking so old before his time—alive and smiling; his mother handing him pills that were far too big for him to swallow; Richie throwing spitballs at the back of his head in history; the sickening snap of his arm; Stan smiling at him for the last time; watching the news while his mother warned him about blood and needles and what happens when boys touch other boys and the shame he felt that was somehow both hot and cold at the same time; Richie telling him he didn’t like the arcade anymore, it’s for babies; moving to New York City and the smell of his mother’s sick room; kissing Myra and feeling weak with misery; staring at his bottles of pills and wondering just how many he needed to get it over with; Richie’s face in the Jade of the Orient; Richie’s face always—in the bowels of Derry, in the hospital when he woke up, in Los Angeles, when they married, when they were approved for adoption, when Lydia and Tess first called them Daddy and Papa. Then, just as quickly, the images and sounds rushed into a box as if sucked in by a vacuum, and a hand slammed a cover down over it.

The air rushed back into his lungs with such force, he nearly doubled over as he struggled for breath. He coughed and gasped and wiped at his streaming eyes before looking up. Lydia was staring at him curiously, the TV remote held limply in her hand. Tess’s little face crumbled and she launched herself into his arms, her own around his neck. Eddie turned his gaze up at Richie, who was smiling

beautifully and calmly, as if everything had gone according to plan.

“Wha—” Eddie gasped. “What was that?”

Richie’s smile grew and he placed a hand on Tess’s head, stroking her hair comfortingly.

“It’s called shining,” he said.

“She’s not alone in this,” Richie explained. “This guy from New Hampshire, Dan, he’s had this ability since he was a kid. And it started out the same way. He’d have these episodes that looked like seizures but weren’t.”

Eddie nodded, his eyes glued to his clasped hands resting on the kitchen table. He remained silent.

“And she can, like, learn how to control it but he was impressed when I said it seemed like already was to a point,” Richie continued. “At first he was a bit cagey and didn’t want to talk, but when I mentioned Abracadabra, he seemed to trust me.”

“Abracadabra?” Eddie repeated, quirking an eyebrow up.

“I don’t know, maybe it’s, like, a code or something,” Richie shrugged.

Eddie rubbed at the bridge of his nose tiredly. He said nothing.

“But you see it now, right, Eds?” Richie implored, leaning in closer to his husband. “It’s all real. You have to see it. I’m not crazy.”

Eddie looked at his husband’s beseeching face.

“Is that what you’ve been thinking all this time?” he whispered. “That I thought you were crazy?”

Richie swallowed and suddenly paled. He looked away as he gathered his thoughts.

"I—I just thought you didn't...I don't know," he sighed. "Sometimes it seemed like you wanted a rational explanation so badly that you'd ignore...I don't know."

"Rich," Eddie said gently, resting a hand over Richie's, "I never once thought you were crazy."

"But you said—"

"I thought some of the things Mike sent us were a little crazy but never you. I know you just...wanted answers."

"And we have them now," Richie insisted.

"And what are we supposed to do with them?" Eddie asked. "Our daughter has these powers or whatever. Okay, fine. What the fuck are we supposed to do? Expect the government to walk in here like in E.T. or something?"

"No, I..." Richie looked at a loss for words. "I don't know. I think we just have to help her control and understand it. Dan said he knew someone who could help."

"And you trust this guy? I mean, you just spoke to him on the phone," Eddie pointed out.

"I know but he said some things that...He's the real deal, Eds."

Eddie sighed and gazed up at the kitchen ceiling.

"I don't want you talking to him again," he said suddenly, bringing his gaze down to Richie, who looked shocked. "Who knows who this guy is."

"But—"

"If Tess is doing better than let's just leave it at that."

"Eddie—"

"She's not a science experiment."

"I know that!" Richie snapped. "Do you think I'd do anything to put her in harm's way?"

"No, we're just going to...let things lie for now," Eddie said, squeezing Richie's hand. "If something...changes, then we'll talk about it some more."

Richie's shoulders slumped as he frowned.

"Alright," he said after a few moments. "I guess so."

Eddie reached out a hand and caressed his husband's face. Richie looked at him, surprised.

"I've really fucking missed you," Eddie admitted, his voice cracking.

"I've been right here," Richie replied, confused.

Eddie shook his head and, to his immense embarrassment, felt a hot prickling behind his eyes.

"The last few months, you've been so obsessed with figuring this thing out with Tess—and I get it, I really do, I wanted answers, too, and you're a great father who just wants to keep our girls safe—but it really felt like you've been...gone," he said, the words pouring out of his mouth. "It got to the point where it seemed like you were pulling away. Not just from me but even Lydia. I mean, she's our daughter, too."

Richie stared at him with a wide-eyed, slightly horrified look on his face.

"Eddie..." he whispered.

"It's fine," Eddie said quickly. "I just—"

"No, I..." Richie replied, resting his own hand over Eddie's. "I didn't...I'm so fucking stupid."

"Rich, come on."

"And after last night..."

"Was that about this?" Eddie asked curiously. Richie nodded, shame-faced. "But why?"

Richie sighed and straightened in his seat.

"I don't know," he admitted. "Maybe I was nervous or just...I guess I didn't want to hear you call me crazy again."

"Oh, Rich," Eddie sighed. "Fuck."

Richie shrugged and stood.

"I was just being selfish and fucking blind," he admitted. He offered a tentative smile to his husband. "I'm sorry. Come on, baby, let's go to bed."

Eddie smiled, stood, grasped Richie's hand, and took him to bed.

Saturdays were always good days. They could sleep in, have breakfast as a family, relax (at least until it was time to take Lydia to one of extracurriculars. Today was gymnastics), and just...be.

Richie was standing at the stove, making pancakes and promising Tess that yes, they could watch *The Wizard of Oz* later (even though they had watched it earlier in the week) while Eddie poured another cup of coffee.

"Okay, pancakes almost finished," Richie announced. He glanced around the kitchen. "Lyds not up yet?"

"No," Eddie said. "I'll go get her."

"She better not be sick," Richie mumbled. "That Anderson kid was sneezing when I carpooled Thursday."

"Oh, relax," Eddie replied. "You sound like my mom."

"Hey, be nice about my ex-wife."

Eddie shot him a withering glare and flipped him off (after making

sure Tess was too busy with her nose buried in a pop-up book) before heading down the hallway to Lydia's bedroom. The door was halfway open. He peeked in, frowning when he saw Lydia still in her bed, with her back to the door.

"Lyds?" he said gently.

She sniffed loudly but didn't turn around. He stepped in, walked up to her bed, and rested a hand on her shoulder.

"Lydia, are you okay?"

She turned her face up to him and Eddie's heart lurched when he saw tears streaming down her little face.

"Sweetheart, what it is?" he whispered as he sat beside her on the bed.

She sniffed again and wiped at her eyes.

"Is Tess gonna get taken away?" she asked, her voice thick.

"What?" Eddie asked, nearly breathless. "What are you talking about?"

"I heard you and Papa talking last night," she admitted softly. "Is the government gonna take her like in E.T.? I know she's annoying sometimes but I don't want her taken away!"

Eddie clenched his eyes shut and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Sweetheart, no, that's not..." He trailed off and sighed before gently wiping her tears. "Come on, come in for breakfast and we'll talk to Papa."

He pulled back the blankets and wrapped an arm around her shoulders as they walked down the hallway to the kitchen.

"Hey, Lyds, how many—" Richie looked up and frowned. "What's wrong?"

Eddie sat her down at the table next to her sister and turned towards his husband.

“Lydia is upset because she’s worried about her sister,” he explained, raising his eyebrows at Richie in an effort to get his point across. Richie swallowed and nodded once as Eddie looked at their daughters. “But your Papa and I would never let anything happen to either of you. Right?”

Richie nodded again and smiled at both Lydia and Tess.

“Right,” he repeated. “That’s our jobs, after all. To keep you two safe. No matter what.”

“Even though Tess...” Lydia trailed off, glancing at her sister.

“Listen, Tess isn’t any different from you,” Eddie said quickly. “You’re both our priorities. Understand?”

Both girls nodded.

“But maybe...” Richie stopped short and swallowed nervously. He ran a hand through his hair. “Girls, I think it’d be best if you didn’t...mention anything about Tess’s...abilities to anyone.”

“Why not?” Tess asked.

Richie hesitated.

“Because people might not understand,” Eddie said quickly. “And it’s nobody’s business. So let’s just...keep it to ourselves.”

Tess nodded and continued eating her pancakes but Lydia still seemed distressed. Eddie felt his heart clench as he recognized some of his own childhood fear on her face. He reached out, took her hand in his, and kissed it gently.

“There’s no need to worry,” he said firmly. “I swear to you, Lydia.”

She swallowed and nodded.

“Okay, Daddy,” she said softly. “I believe you.”

They smiled at one another when Richie ruined the moment by exclaiming, “Oh, shit, the pancakes.” He rushed to the stove where

several pancakes were burning.

Eddie rolled his eyes but smiled when he saw both his daughters laughing.

“Are we fucking this up?”

Eddie took a deep breath and turned his face towards his husband. Richie was staring at the ceiling, a worried look on his face.

“Rich, I...” he sighed. “I don’t know.”

“Now Lydia’s scared,” Richie whispered. “Lydia’s not scared of anything but now...”

“That’s not your fault.”

“I didn’t say it was my fault, asshole,” Richie replied. He sighed and rolled onto his side towards Eddie. “How can we protect the girls when we don’t even fully understand what we’re dealing with?”

Eddie frowned and turned onto his side, as well. He reached a hand over to brush Richie’s curls behind his ear. Eddie felt himself smile. Even after all these years together, he still found the sight of Richie without his glasses amusingly odd.

“What are you grinning at?”

“You,” Eddie answered. “You look funny.”

“Thanks,” Richie huffed.

“Shut up, I didn’t mean it like that,” Eddie sighed. “And you’re right. I don’t know how we deal with this. I mean...I guess we need to do more research.”

“I think I read everything out there,” Richie admitted.

Eddie gave his husband a penetrating look.

“You want to talk to that Dan guy, don’t you?” he said.

Richie bit his lip and nodded once. Eddie sighed.

“Alright,” he said gently. “But we do this together. No more hiding things, okay? Including how we fucking feel.”

Richie nodded and smiled so genuinely, it made Eddie shiver. He leaned in and pressed his lips against Richie’s.

“I really have fucking missed you,” he said.

“Me too,” Richie whispered against his lips.

They kissed for several more deliciously long moments, wrapped up in each other’s arms. Eddie pulled Richie flushed against him, and groaned at the feeling of Richie’s erection.

“Fuck,” Eddie whispered. “Kids definitely asleep?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Door locked?”

“Fuck.”

“Wanna just chance it?”

Richie grinned and reached his hand down underneath Eddie’s boxer shorts. Eddie moaned.

“Good,” Richie murmured, “you’re hard already.”

“Course I am, I told you I fucking miss you.”

“Good,” Richie repeated, leaning in to kiss him again, “because I do not feel like waiting. I need you to fuck me like yesterday.”

“You sound like an idiot,” Eddie laughed.

“How is that any different to how I sound everyday?”

“Good point,” Eddie admitted, releasing a shaking breath as Richie stroked him. “Fuck, Richie.”

“Yeah, exactly,” Richie replied, smiling as Eddie rolled his eyes. “Get the lube. And don’t make faces. You love me.”

“Yeah,” Eddie sighed, grinning, “I really fucking do.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!

10. Sisters

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie are taught a valuable lesson by their eldest daughter.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

Eddie was silent for a long moment and Richie worried he was about to call the whole thing off when he suddenly nodded once. Richie exhaled a shaking breath.

“Okay,” he said and dialed the number on his phone. It rang several times, both men holding their breath, until a generic voicemail message began speaking. “Shit.”

Richie hung up.

“That’s definitely the right number?” Eddie asked.

“Yeah. Should we try again later?”

Eddie shrugged.

“You could leave a message, I guess,” he muttered. “I still feel weird about this. Maybe we should do a background check on this guy.”

“We’re not inviting him to our house, Eds.”

“Yeah, but people can find things pretty easily nowadays.” Eddie sighed. “Has Tess mentioned anything to you about this...shine thing lately?”

Richie shook his head.

“She’s been pretty normal,” he said. “She did cry the other day when you left for work but I think that’s because she didn’t sleep well the night before.”

Eddie ran a hand through his hair.

“And why’s it called a shine?” he muttered to himself. “What the hell does that mean?”

Richie shrugged.

“Sounds cooler than just saying, I have weirdass powers I can’t explain,” he offered.

Eddie sighed and shook his head.

“Let’s wait a while and then we’ll try calling him again,” he said. He made as if to leave the room when he paused suddenly. He turned back to his husband. “The other day, when you had her show me her...shine...she said she didn’t want to because she didn’t want to hurt my feelings. Do you know why she said that?”

Richie frowned and shook his head.

“I figured it was just because you’re her favorite,” he admitted.

“Shut up, she doesn’t have a favorite,” Eddie replied tiredly. “You gotta get that shit out of your head.”

“I know, I know, I’m just kidding,” Richie said, sounding like he was definitely not kidding.

Eddie leaned down and kissed him gently.

“You’re too old to let your self-confidence be dictated by a four-year-old,” he murmured.

“Hey, I accept the fact that I’m second-choice, Eds.”

“Well, you’re first choice for me, dipshit.”

Richie wanted to crack a joke about technically being his second what with Myra being there first but he was smart enough to keep his mouth shut and enjoyed Eddie’s kisses.

Laundry was one of the few chores that Richie actually enjoyed. Aside from the occasional pukefest (he had learned early into parenthood that kids apparently can only puke in the messiest, Regan-in-The-Exorcist-style manner), it wasn’t that gross, and it was therapeutic to see a full hamper emptied and neatly folded clothes on the bed, ready to be put away. Plus, the smell of freshly done laundry was one of the best smells in the world and he could always convince one of the girls to help him with folding—so long as he put the TV on as they did so.

He was carrying a bag of freshly done laundry down the hall, wondering if Tess would let him choose what to watch as they folded when he heard hushed voices from her room. He paused. Now, little kids did tend to speak aloud to themselves, especially when playing, but this sounded...different.

He gently placed the bag of laundry on the floor and took a tentative step closer to Tess’s door, which was slightly ajar. Concentrating, he could just make out Tess’s young voice, speaking excitedly to no one. Holding his breath, Richie took another quiet step closer and listened carefully.

“I know,” Tess said happily, “I saw. And I’m getting better at it.”

Richie frowned. No one was responding and unless someone had managed to break in and not set off their house alarms, he and his daughter were alone in the house. And Tess, like Lydia, always provided multiple voices when playing alone with their dolls. Now, she fell silent, as if listening to a response only she could hear.

“I know,” she repeated, “thank you. I’m doing so good.” She suddenly

laughed. "That's silly, Abra!"

Breathless and with his heart pounding, Richie rushed towards the door and abruptly pushed it open. Tess jumped, startled.

"Tess?" he asked, breathlessly.

She suddenly looked around her room and pouted.

"Papa, you made Abracadabra go away!" she exclaimed sadly.

"I did?" Richie said, gazing around himself. Her room looked the same as always. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," she shrugged. She lifted her coloring book and showed him the page she was working on. "Like it?"

"Yeah, great job," he offered gently. He sat beside her on her bed and tried to decide how best to ask. "So...you were just talking to Abracadabra?"

"Uh-huh," Tess replied, stretching out on her bed and flipping to a fresh page to color.

"What did...what did you guys talk about?" he asked casually.

She shrugged.

"Stuff."

"What kinda stuff?"

"Ummm," she said, "school and my shine and stuff."

Richie nodded. Tess reached up to him with a crayon. He smiled, warmed by her natural kindness, and took it, leaning over to color with her. They were both silent for a while, content to merely color the page. Richie swallowed before continuing, "So, um, what does Abracadabra look like?"

"Like a girl," Tess replied, selecting another crayon.

"A girl like you? Your age, I mean?"

She shook her head.

“No, bigger,” she said.

“Like Lydia?”

“No, bigger, I think.”

“A grown-up?”

Tess furrowed her little face before shaking her head again.

“Okay,” Richie said. “And she’s nice to you?”

“Oh yeah,” Tess replied, smiling, “she’s my friend.”

“Good, that’s good,” Richie replied. He fell silent and watched his daughter color happily. “You know you can tell me anything, right?”

She nodded.

“Yep.”

“Hey,” he said gently and, with his free hand, tenderly lifted her chin so her eyes met his, “I mean it. You never have to be afraid to tell me or you Dad anything. We love you no matter what.”

“I know,” Tess replied, a mildly confused look on her face.

Richie gazed at her for a long moment before nodding.

“Alright, good,” he said. “You wanna help me fold the laundry?”

“Can we watch *Wizard of Oz*, too?”

Richie huffed a laugh.

“Yeah, kiddo, come on.”

Richie placed the last folded washcloth on the towering pile of laundry and leaned back. He reached down and reclined in his seat,

once again grateful that he had convinced Eddie to spring for the reclining couch last year (though Eddie had insisted they were for old people). Once he was comfortable, he lifted his arm and Tess snuggled up against him, her arm thrown around his middle.

She sighed happily.

“You good, kid?” Richie asked.

“Uh-huh,” she said. She squeezed her arm around him. “I like this.”

“I like this, too,” Richie replied, his heart overflowing with love. She’s finally warming up to me, he thought.

“Yeah,” Tess said. “This is comfy. You’re soft.”

That startled a laugh out of Richie.

“I’m soft?” he repeated, glancing down at his daughter.

“Yeah,” she said. “I like it. Makes you comfy.”

Richie grinned.

“So I shouldn’t try to lose weight and get muscles?” he asked playfully.

Tess looked up at him, frowning.

“No way,” she said quickly.

Richie laughed and leaned down to kiss his daughter on the top of her curls.

“I love you, kiddo,” he said gently.

“Love you, too,” she replied, then brought her finger to her lips. “Shh.”

“Oh, yeah, sorry, you’re right,” Richie said and turned back to the TV, where Glinda was singing. Richie wondered how many times he had watched this movie since adopting Tess but figured it was a lost cause. Well, at least it was better than most of the crap they call

family films today.

Dorothy and the Scarecrow had only just met the Tin Man when the front door opened.

“We’re home,” Eddie called.

“In here,” Richie replied. Tess cuddled in closer against him.

Both Eddie and Lydia entered the living room, Lydia rushing ahead and breathless.

“Papa, I—ugh, this movie again?” she groaned.

“Tess helped me with the laundry so she got to pick what to watch,” Richie explained.

Lydia rolled her eyes. “We watch this movie all the time,” she pointed out.

“Lyds, I thought you were going to tell everyone what you got today at gymnastics,” Eddie said, trying to get her back on track.

“What’d you get?” Richie asked.

“Shh!” Tess hushed.

Lydia pouted as she glared at her sister. Richie sighed and picked up the remote, pausing the movie.

“Hey!” Tess exclaimed.

“Your sister has something to tell us,” Eddie said, raising an eyebrow at Tess, which only resulted in her pouting, too. “Go on, Lyds.”

Lydia, still a slight frown on her face, opened her rainbow tote bag and pulled out a colorful piece of paper. She held it out for her father and sister to see.

“What’s this?” Richie asked, leaning over as he read it.

“Says I’m the best listener,” Lydia mumbled, no longer excited.

“And most improved,” Eddie said.

“Hey, that’s great, kiddo,” Richie said happily. “You’re gonna be the next Simone Biles. Or even better than her. Not that it’s a competition or anything but...you know.”

Lydia smiled shyly and shrugged.

“Can we put the movie back on now?” Tess asked.

“How about you say congrats to your sister first?” Eddie offered.

She turned towards her sister.

“Congrats, movie now please,” she said quickly.

Lydia’s smile disappeared. She turned towards Eddie.

“I told you she wouldn’t care,” she exclaimed. “No one cares!”

“Hang on, sweetheart, we all care,” Eddie said, reaching out towards her.

“Yeah, that’s awesome,” Richie insisted. “Tess is just being fussy.”

“Am not,” Tess shot back, annoyed at the insinuation.

“No, she’s being a brat,” Lydia declared.

“Lydia,” Eddie said firmly, “that was unnecessary. Your sister isn’t a brat. Apologize.”

“No,” she replied, suddenly sounding very near tears. “It’s not fair. She is so a brat because you guys love her more than you love me!”

Both men blinked at her in shock and Lydia clearly took their silence as confirmation because she continued, “You only care about Tess and her stupid shine thing. It’s just not fair! I’m special, too!”

“Of course, you are—”

“And she is so a brat, a big one!”

“Am not!” Tess insisted, now thoroughly riled up.

“Are so,” Lydia replied. She pointed at her sister, curled up against Richie. “You’re a big brat and Daddy only loves you because of your shine. That’s it!”

Tess instantly burst into tears, hiding her face against her father’s shirt and wailing. Lydia blinked and, before either of her fathers even had the chance to catch up to what just happened, ran out of the room, down the hall, and slammed the door of her bedroom closed.

Richie and Eddie stared at one another.

Over Tess’s head, Richie mouthed the words, “What the fuck?”

“Okay, so how do we handle this?” Eddie asked, his hands flying as he paced around the living room.

“How am I supposed to know?” Richie asked.

“You have sisters,” Eddie pointed out. “Wait, call your sister. See how she deals with shit like this with her kids.”

Richie sighed and glanced down at their youngest daughter, asleep on the couch. After a thoroughly intense crying session, only calmed down by both her fathers assuring her she was not a brat and they loved her equally and deeply, Tess had done the helpful thing and passed out. Frankly, Richie thought that most of the world’s problems could be solved by naps but they still had a pissed off Lydia to deal with and she was not one for naps.

“I think we need to talk to her together,” he offered.

“And say what to her?”

“I don’t know, that we love her?”

Eddie paused and ran a hand through his hair.

“I think we need to punish her for flying off the handle like that,” he

said.

“Well, Tess kinda was being a brat,” Richie observed, wincing when Eddie shot him a disdainful look. “But yeah, okay, name-calling is a punishable offense.”

Eddie sighed, his shoulders slumped.

“Maybe if we can just get them to apologize to one another,” he murmured.

“Perfect, no punishments necessary,” Richie said, standing from the couch, careful to not disturb his sleeping daughter. “Come on, we’re in this together.”

“What, right now?” Eddie asked, wide-eyed.

“No, let’s keep our daughter in her room for a week, see how it goes,” Richie replied. “Yes, right now. Don’t be a baby.”

“Hey, no name-calling,” Eddie shot back. “She clearly learned that behavior from you.”

“Yeah, like you’ve never called me names,” Richie said, rolling his eyes. “You barely call me Richie.”

Eddie looked as if he was about to reply but thought better of it. He merely scowled as he followed his husband down the hall. After a moment’s hesitation, Richie knocked on Lydia’s bedroom door.

“Lyds, we’re gonna come in, okay?” he said gently. “We gotta talk.”

“I don’t wanna,” came the muffled reply.

“Well, that’s too bad,” Richie sighed. “We’re coming in.”

“But it’s my room!”

Richie couldn’t help it. He smiled.

“I tried that line with my parents many times,” he said as he twisted the doorknob. “It didn’t work in the 80s and it won’t work now.”

He opened the door and he and Eddie gazed at their daughter, sitting on her bed with a tear-stained face. Her arms crossed over her chest and her bag and its contents spilled across the floor. Richie felt oddly small in front of her angry, disappointed stare. Luckily, Eddie—already familiar with staring angrily and disappointedly—stepped up to the plate.

“Lydia,” he said gently, slowly walking towards her, “I know you were hurt but you can’t call your sister a brat.”

Lydia huffed and looked away.

“Look, she was wrong, too, and once she wakes up, we’re going to talk to her,” he said quickly, “but she’s still just a little kid. She doesn’t always know better.”

“That’s not fair,” Lydia muttered.

“I know,” Richie replied, rubbing his neck as he remembered his own tear-filled arguments with his sisters growing up. “I have a big and a little sister. Growing up, nothing seemed fair.”

Lydia glanced at him but quickly looked away, tightening her arms across her chest. Richie stepped towards her and sat beside her on the bed.

“Look, kid, it’s not easy being the older sister, I get that,” he offered. “And I know this family has been a bit...focused on Tess for the last few months but that’s just because we need to make sure you’re *both* safe and healthy. Not because we love one of you more.”

Lydia wiped at her eyes and sniffed.

“But sometimes,” she whimpered, “sometimes it’s like you guys don’t even know I’m here.”

Richie had had his heart broken several times in his life and each time he had thought it was the worst feeling in the world. Now, as he gazed at his daughter wiping away her tears, he knew all those other times had been bullshit. He fell silent, unable to put his troubled thoughts into words.

“Lydia, you’re our first born,” Eddie said, crouching down in front of her. “You think we’d ever overlook or forget you? Do you know how important you are to us? To this family?” Lydia hesitated before shrugging. “Your dad, sister, and I would be lost without you,” Eddie stated firmly, taking her hand.

Richie stared at the two of them, awed. Maybe it wasn’t Bill who had the way with words.

Lydia sniffed again and smiled softly.

“So we’re sorry if we ever made you feel that way,” Eddie continued. “But you need to say you’re sorry to your sister, too. And we’ll make sure she apologizes to you, too.”

“Okay,” Lydia sighed. “M sorry.”

Eddie stood and leaned down to kiss her on her forehead.

“Clean up your bag and come into the kitchen for lunch,” he said. “Rich, wanna help me?”

Richie blinked, stood, and followed his husband out to the kitchen.

“You handled that like a fucking champ today.”

Eddie glanced up as he tapped at his tablet.

“What?” he murmured.

“With Tess and Lydia,” Richie clarified, putting away their laundry in their drawers. “You knew just want to say to Lyds. I fucking froze.”

“You didn’t freeze,” Eddie replied. “You were good with her, too.”

Richie shrugged.

“I looked at her and just couldn’t...couldn’t find the words,” he sighed. “It was like looking at myself as a kid and I couldn’t even say anything.”

“Richie,” Eddie said, lowering his tablet and gazing at his husband, “you did good. You’re too hard on yourself.”

“I don’t know,” Riche mumbled. He looked over at Eddie and smiled gently. “Remember how nervous you were back when we first started looking into adoption? Look at you now. Fucking father of the year.”

Eddie rolled his eyes and smiled.

“You’re overreacting,” he said, shaking his head. After a few moments’ silence, he glanced up at Richie. “What are you staring at?”

“You, dipshit,” Richie replied, grinning.

“I thought we said no name-calling,” Eddie shot back, a smirk on his face.

“For the girls, yes,” Richie answered, walking over towards Eddie. He took his husband’s face in his hands and kissed him deeply. Eddie moaned softly against his lips and Richie was just about to move his hands to his waist when something started buzzing. “Fuck, is that your phone or mine?”

“Yours,” Eddie sighed. “Over on the bureau.”

“Ugh.”

Richie got up and hurried across the room.

“Whoever it is, tell them it’s after 9pm and we don’t take calls now,” Eddie said.

Richie grasped the phone and lifted it, his stomach clenching when he saw the unsaved New Hampshire number on the screen. He stared at it as it buzzed in his hand.

“Who is it?” Eddie asked.

Richie looked up at his husband, his hair disheveled and his face so sweet and inviting.

“No one,” Richie replied and placed the phone back down before

returning to Eddie.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't
forget to comment!

11. Mother

Summary for the Chapter:

Eddie realizes that the past doesn't always stay in the past.

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't leave these two alone so I wrote more of Eddie and Richie's adventures in parenthood.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

Eddie looked up at his childhood home and wondered if it had always been this dreary. The paint was peeling and darkness seemed to permeate from the dirty windows. The collar of his shirt seemed to tighten around his neck as sweat began to bead along his forehead. A movement from the front window caught his attention, and he squinted against the sunlight to see two little faces gazing out at him. His heart fell as cold fear rushed through his body.

“Tess, Lydia,” he gasped. He ran towards the front door—or, at least, he tried to run. Every step was like sinking deeper and deeper into quicksand. He stumbled, crawled, and dragged himself up to the front door, frantic at the idea of his daughters trapped in the house he had tried so often to escape. It seemed to take hours but he was finally reaching the doorknob when the door suddenly swung open.

“Eddie, sweetie, what are you doing out here?” his mother asked, a surprised look on her face.

He gasped for breath, his heart pounding and sweat dripping into his eyes. From his position on his knees, she seemed even bigger and more intimidating than he ever remembered, filling the entire doorway. She

reached down and, grasping him by the scruff of his neck, dragged him into his childhood home. It stank of stale air and moth balls. His mother released him, and he collapsed face first onto the carpet. He gagged as he tried to stand.

"I'm disappointed in you, Eddie," his mother continued. "You're not doing a good job. I taught you better."

Eddie managed to get onto his hands and knees, coughing violently as he looked up. His daughters, or wan, listless imitations of his daughters, were sitting at the kitchen table, an assortment of pills spread out before them.

"Tess, Lydia," he repeated but his mother's hand gripped the back of his neck again and wrenched his head up.

"Look at these poor girls," she said. "You're not taking care of them at all."

With more strength than he ever thought she possessed, his mother flung him back down to the floor and headed towards his daughters. He tried to shout but his throat seized up.

"Don't worry, dears, Granny is here and will take care of you from now on," she said in a sickly sweet sing-song voice. "You just need your vitamins and proper nutrition."

"No, wait..." Eddie managed to choke out.

He watched, horrified, as his mother poured them juice that looked eerily like blood into two large glasses. She placed the glasses before them and insisted they use them to wash down their vitamins.

"No, girls, don't," he gasped. "Don't listen to her."

"It's horrible when a grandmother doesn't get to see her grandchildren, isn't it?" his mother asked his daughters. They nodded. She grinned, and Eddie realized it was more frightening than the clown's smile had ever been. "I made mistakes with you, Eddie-Bear, but I'll do better with them. I have always dreamed of having little girls of my own."

Eddie gasped awake, swatting at the feeling of fingers on his arm.

“Daddy?”

He blinked and pressed his hand against his wildly beating heart. Tess was standing at his bedside, a concerned look on her young face. He shuddered and took a deep breath.

“Tess, wha—what are you doing here?” he asked.

“You were having a bad dream,” she replied.

Eddie closed his eyes and ran a hand over his face, trying desperately not to give way to tears. He counted his breaths and then, when he was ready, dropped his hand and opened his eyes. He glanced to his side. Richie was still asleep, snoring gently. He sighed.

“What time is it?” he mumbled.

“I dunno,” Tess shrugged.

He leaned over, grabbed his phone, saw that it was nearly five in the morning, and sighed once again.

“Sweetheart, you need to be in bed,” he said gently.

“But you were having a bad dream,” she repeated.

Eddie smiled reassuringly before pulling back the covers and stepping out of bed.

“Well, I’m not having a bad dream now,” he said, “so let’s get you back to bed.”

“But I’m not sleepy,” Tess answered as she took her father’s hand and followed him out of the bedroom.

“But it’s far too early to be awake,” he explained. “And you’ll just be cranky later.”

“No, I won’t,” she insisted but didn’t argue when he opened her door and led her to her unmade bed.

“Come on, I bet you’ll fall asleep in no time,” he said, tucking her in

and bringing her favorite stuffed unicorn to her arms. He smiled down at her as she snuggled under the blankets. "How'd you know I was having a bad dream?"

"I saw it," she yawned.

"You saw my dream?"

"Kinda," she said, rubbing at her eyes.

Eddie tried not to panic. He merely swallowed and smiled.

"Well, it wasn't real," he said quickly.

"I know," Tess replied, yawning again. "You're okay now."

"Yep, I'm okay, baby."

"But you were sad and scared."

"A little bit," Eddie admitted. "But it's okay to feel sad and scared sometimes. It never lasts forever."

Tess peered up at her father, a doubtful look on her face.

"I don't like it when you're sad," she said quietly.

Eddie nodded.

"I understand," he said gently. "I don't like it when you're sad, either."

"You get sad a lot," she pointed out.

Eddie frowned and shook his head.

"No, sweetheart, I'm not sad a lot," he insisted. "I'm happy."

Tess yawned again and her eyes slowly closed before she responded, "But your eyes are sad, Daddy."

“Richie, Richie.”

“Huh?” Richie mumbled, slowly blinking awake. He brushed his hair out of his face and squinted at the foot of his bed, where his husband was standing. “Wha’s going on?”

“Am I depressed?” Eddie asked.

“What?” Richie yawned. “What the fuck are you...what time is it?”

“A little after five,” Eddie answered, “but seriously, do you think I’m depressed? Like really?”

“Jesus, Eds,” Richie moaned, collapsing against his pillows. “Why are you awake? Why am I awake? Come back to bed.”

Eddie climbed in but instead of settling down beside his husband, he sat up and grasped Richie’s hand.

“Come on, I need to talk to you,” he implored, nervous energy thrumming through his body.

Richie sighed and rubbed at his eyes before opening them fully.

“What’s going on with you?” he asked, yawning.

“Do you think I have depression?”

Richie stared at him, clearly still not firing on all cylinders.

“Babe, what brought this on? Are you okay?” he asked.

Eddie sighed as his shoulders slumped.

“Something Tess said,” he mumbled quickly, suddenly embarrassed.

“What’s that?”

Eddie shook his head.

“Nevermind, I’m just...” he trailed off.

“Eds,” Richie repeated, reaching his arm up to rest his hand along

Eddie's face, "talk to me. I mean, you did wake me up at the ass crack of dawn so you better make it worth my while."

Eddie laughed and shook his head before clearing his throat.

"She said I have sad eyes," he admitted.

Richie cocked his head to the side as he gazed at Eddie, his face softening.

"Oh, babe," he said gently, caressing the side of Eddie's face, "you have gorgeous eyes. I love them."

"You know that's not what I'm talking about," Eddie said, frowning.

"I know, it's just..." Richie sighed. "Alright, she's right. Sometimes. Sometimes your eyes get a bit sad but not all the time."

"I can't even remember the last time I went to therapy," Eddie admitted. "I mean, between work and the kids and everything with Tess..."

Richie sat up and wrapped an arm around his husband.

"Well, okay, maybe it is time to get back into therapy," he offered. "I mean, it can't hurt. And you do have a shit ton of plates up in the air. A little bit of guidance could only help."

Eddie sighed again before shaking his head.

"You still didn't answer my question," he mumbled.

"What question?"

"Do you think I'm depressed?"

Richie paused as he considered his answer. Eddie tensed, somehow dreading his response.

"I don't know," he admitted. "I mean, I'm not unfamiliar with depression, you know that, but it's different for everyone." Eddie closed his eyes. Richie tightened his arm around him. "Baby, it's okay

if you are. We'll get it under control."

"But I don't have a fucking reason to be depressed," Eddie whispered. "I mean, I have fucking everything I could want, right? I got you and the girls and I just...I don't..."

"Eds, Eddie," Richie said, rubbing his back in gentle circles, "we both know depression doesn't discriminate. It doesn't care that on the surface, we're really fucking happy. It just...is."

Eddie nodded, trying to swallow down the feeling of guilt.

"What kind of an idiot am I though," he asked, "that it took a four-year-old to diagnose me?"

"You're not an idiot," Richie said. "If you are depressed, which we don't know if you are, it's hard to realize when you're in the thick of it. Trust me."

Eddie nodded and leaned his head down onto Richie's shoulder, exhaling a shaking breath and closing his eyes.

"When did Tess say this to you, anyway?" Richie asked.

"Just now."

"Now?" Richie asked, raising an eyebrow. "She's awake?"

"I put her back to bed," Eddie whispered. "She woke me up. Saved me from a bad dream."

"Oh."

"She said she saw it."

Richie's hand stilled on his back.

"She saw your dream?" he repeated quietly.

"Yeah," Eddie said. He straightened suddenly. "My mother was in my dream. She was trying to take the girls from me."

"Oh, Eddie..."

"If she saw it, then she saw my mother," Eddie gasped, fresh fear in his heart. "I can't have that. I can't have her...Jesus, Richie, if she can see our past than that means she can see fucking everything. I mean, I thought Pennywise was the worst of it but I can't have the girls knowing about...fuck, Richie."

Without a word, Richie took Eddie into his arms and pressed him against his chest, kissing the top of his head repeatedly. Eddie clenched his eyes shut and tried to will the tears away.

"Fuck," he whispered, "I don't want them to know about my mother. About Myra. I know it's fucking selfish and cowardly of me but—"

"You need to stop talking, Eddie Tozier," Richie insisted against his hair. "You couldn't be selfish or cowardly even if you tried."

"You're full of shit," he muttered.

"I am but not about this," Richie replied, running his fingers through Eddie's hair. "You don't have to tell the kids anything you're not comfortable with."

"And if I hide things from them, I'm just as bad as—"

"If you're about to compare yourself to your mom, I swear to God, Eddie..."

"Okay, okay," Eddie sighed, rubbing his forehead. He allowed himself several long moments of being gently rocked by his husband, relishing the feeling of being taken care of and not smothered. He yawned. "God, I'm tired."

"Course you are, it's the middle of the night."

"Not quite, Richie," Eddie smiled. "I'd be getting up for work in another hour and a half."

"So," Richie said, placing his hand gently on Eddie's leg, "plenty of time to mess around?"

Eddie laughed before he turned towards Richie's sheepish face and kissed him deeply.

“Yeah,” he said, “we got time for that.”

Eddie groaned, rolled over, and reached for his alarm, quickly switching it off. The arms around him tightened.

“Rich, I gotta get up,” he muttered.

“No,” Richie mumbled against his neck.

“I got to go to work.”

“Stay home.”

Eddie huffed a laugh and turned in Richie’s arms, leaning down to kiss him on the side of his face.

“I can’t believe we fell asleep again,” he muttered. “We’re getting old.”

Richie yawned, stretched, and rolled over onto his side. Eddie shook his head, still smiling, and stood from the bed. He headed towards their closet when he noticed Richie’s phone still sitting on their bureau.

“I think I heard your phone go off a couple times last night,” Eddie said, picking it up.

“Mm,” Richie yawned, still half-asleep. “Who?”

Eddie picked up his husband’s phone, tapped in his passcode, and clicked on the missed calls. They were all from a New Hampshire number. Something Richie had said earlier floated through his mind.

“Rich,” he said. When he didn’t respond, Eddie stepped towards the bed and gently grasped Richie’s foot from under the covers, shaking it. “Wake up.”

“Wha?” he groaned, blinking up at his husband. “What is it?”

“The guy you contacted,” Eddie said carefully, “about Tess’s shine,

where's he from?"

Richie paused as he tried to remember.

"New Hampshire," he replied.

Eddie lifted his phone.

"Well, he called a bunch last night," he said, offering it to his husband. "What the hell?"

Richie took the phone from Eddie and looked down at the screen.

"Hmm," he said. "I don't know. I don't know why he'd want to talk to me so bad. He was kinda standoffish when I last spoke to him."

Eddie frowned.

"You think it's something bad?" he asked slowly.

Richie hesitated before shaking his head.

"I'm sure it's fine," he said firmly.

Eddie hesitated, biting his lip before asking, "Do you think it's too early to call back?"

Richie blinked up at him.

"You...you wanna...are you sure?" he asked.

Eddie ran a hand through his hair and thought of his little daughter witnessing just a simulacrum of his childhood and his mother and that was enough to turn his stomach.

"Yeah," Eddie insisted. "Call him. We need to know how to get this under control and keep her safe."

"You don't think Tess is safe?" Richie asked, raising an eyebrow.

Eddie wanted to say that even with his mother long dead, her malignant grip could still reach his daughters but he bit his tongue. Instead, he simply took his husband's hand and said, "Call him. I

want answers. Tess deserves that much, at least.”

Richie nodded and called Dan Torrance’s number.

Notes for the Chapter:

Stop by hollymartinswrites.tumblr.com to say hi!
Thank you again so very much for reading and don't
forget to comment!

12. The Shine

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie receive some surprising information about their daughter's shine.

Notes for the Chapter:

This was supposed to just be a quick, cutesy one shot featuring Richie and Eddie as high-strung, eccentric parents. It turned into something longer, with a bit more angst and self-doubt than expected. These two just couldn't resist.

Please enjoy and thank you so very much reading. Please remember that comments are love and writers as insecure as myself depend on them for nourishment.

Not beta-read so any mistakes are my own.

Also, a word of warning:

I've never read or seen Doctor Sleep. I've started the book multiple times but never finished so my characterizations of specific characters from this book/movie are really based on my own opinions and research. Please don't be angry if they aren't accurate to the canon. I had to take liberties with these characters anyway to fit into this story but I wanted you to be aware of this from the beginning. Thank you for understanding!

“Hello?”

“Hi,” Richie said, wincing as his voice cracked nervously. Jesus, he sounded like an idiot. “Uh, hi, this is Richie. You called me last night. A few times.”

“Oh, yeah,” the voice on the other end of the line said before clearing his throat. “It’s Dan.”

“Yeah, I know,” Richie replied, wincing again. “Um, it’s not too early, is it?”

“No, I was already up,” Dan Torrance replied and Richie had the feeling he was telling the truth. “We’ve been playing phone tag.”

“I know, sorry about that,” Richie said and glanced at Eddie, who nodded briefly. “Um, listen, you’re on speaker right now and I’m with my husband. We had a few questions for you, if this is an okay time to talk.”

“Sure,” Dan answered. “Go ahead.”

“Well, um...Eddie?”

Eddie swallowed before leaning closer towards the phone.

“Uh, hi, I just...” he sighed. “Look, what the fuck exactly is this shine you’re talking about?”

To their surprise, Dan laughed.

“You’re gonna hate me for this,” he said, “but I don’t really know. I mean, I’ve been working with some scientists and researchers and at best, they can just say it’s a form of...psychic ability.”

“So...psychics are real?” Richie asked dubiously.

“Well, I’m pretty sure the ones on TV are full of shit,” Dan replied. “And it’s not like I can look at you and see exactly what’s going to happen in the future. It’s more like...ideas. If that makes any sense.”

“But our daughter sees the past.”

“She’s seeing flickers of it,” Dan explained, “through you guys. And the people around her. At least, that’s what A—what I think she is doing. She’s not reading your minds, if that’s what concerns you.”

Richie glanced at Eddie, who still had a puzzled look on his face.

“Why is it called the shine?” he asked.

“That’s just what someone called it when he explained it to me as a kid,” Dan replied. “The name sorta stuck.”

“Jesus, how many shining people are there?” Richie asked.

“I don’t know,” Dan sighed. “I think there’s a lot more than we think. Probably a lot who don’t even realize they have it. I don’t know why we develop it. I found out recently that I’m not the only one in my family who has it but who knows what that means. Maybe we’re all born with it and it just flourishes in some people.”

Richie and Eddie fell silent, their minds awlirl. Suddenly, Richie remembered Abracadabra.

“Dan, is this...having the shine as a kid...well, I mean,” he said, trying to gather his thoughts. “Our daughter has an imaginary friend. But she said that this friend taught her about her shine. Is that...normal? Or is someone...”

“Is our daughter in any danger basically?” Eddie asked quickly.

“No, no,” Dan said quickly. “I mean, not...shit. Look, there was a group of people who—they’re not around anymore—who could’ve...who, if they found out about your daughter, they could’ve hurt her but they’re all dead now.”

The room seemed to spin and Richie clenched his eyes shut, fighting the instinct to drop the phone and run to his daughter’s room and gather her up in his arms.

“What do you mean they’re dead now?” Eddie asked numbly, his hand gripping Richie’s free one tightly.

Dan was silent for a worryingly long moment.

“I mean just that,” he admitted quietly. “I made sure of it.”

“How can we know they’re all gone? I mean, you said you’re working with scientists. Are people going to show up one day and take our daughter away for tests or some shit?” Richie asked, the tremble in

his voice evident.

“No, no,” Dan said quickly. “There isn’t a database of us or something. And I swear to you, I haven’t told anyone about your daughter.” He sighed. “Look, I know how you feel. I have...someone with the shine in my life who’s like a daughter to me. She’s older than your girl but still young, and I can’t...she’s the most important person in my life and protecting her is everything to me.”

Both men gazed at one another, wondering just how much he could understand. Richie sighed and looked down, absently noticing that his hand holding the phone was shaking slightly.

“Your daughter’s imaginary friend,” Dan said suddenly, “does she have a name?”

“Abracadabra,” Richie replied impassively.

Once again, Dan fell silent. Eddie frowned and opened his mouth to speak when the other man said, “Well, I had one at her age, too.”

“So...it’s nothing to worry about?” Richie asked.

“No,” Dan replied, a little too quickly. “Listen, I got to get ready for work. But you can call me anytime. I don’t mind.”

“How do we know you’re not full of shit?” Eddie asked suddenly, eliciting yet another wince from Richie.

Much to their surprise, Dan merely laughed.

“I don’t blame you for not trusting me,” he said. “I guess talk to your daughter. See what she thinks.”

With that, he ended the phone call.

It was ten o’clock in the morning and Richie was alone.

The kids were at school, Eddie was at work, and Richie was in his home office staring at a black Word document. His agent had been on

him to increase his writing output and had demanded he work on some jokes for one of his clients' upcoming visits to some late night show. He had given Richie a rundown of what topics to cover and how to segue into promoting...whatever the fuck this comic had to promote but it had all flown right out of his head.

Richie sighed and glanced at the time. 10:02. Fuck.

He ran a hand over his face and flinched. Maybe he should shave. But he hated shaving. But Lydia had complained about how his kisses were scratchy now. So he should shave. Right? Yes, get up, stretch, shave. Be an adult.

The phone rang.

Richie picked it up quickly, barely glancing at whoever was calling, just thankful.

"Hello," he said quickly.

"Hey, whoa, that was fast," Ben observed. "Barely gave it time to ring."

"Well, you know I always get excited when you call, baby doll," Richie cooed. "What's going on? And wait, isn't it like the middle of the night by you?"

"It's seven," Ben laughed. "I've been up for an hour."

"Jesus," Richie sighed. "I actually had an early start today, too. Fucking sucked. So, what do I owe this pleasure? Something good, I hope."

"Yeah," Ben said, "I'm actually calling to see what you're doing for President's Day weekend."

Richie hesitated and furrowed his brows.

"You do realize it's still September right, Ben? Or is Seattle following like the Julian calendar or something?"

"I know it's September but you and Eddie have kids and real

responsibilities,” Ben explained. “So, Bev and I have to catch you ahead of time.”

“Okay but you must know I can’t think that far ahead,” Richie replied. “I mean, the kids and Eddie are usually off for it.”

“Well, that’s why we’re telling you know, months in advance, to keep that weekend free, okay?”

“Um, okay,” Richie said, “for any specific reason? Is the world ending that day or something?”

“No, but if you get an email confirming your plane tickets to Seattle for that weekend, don’t freak out, okay?”

“What the fuck? You can’t do that.”

“Yes, we can,” Ben replied, a hint of self-satisfaction in his voice.

“Well, we’re just gonna pay you back.”

“No, you’re not.”

“What the fuck, Ben? What’s going on?”

“Bev and I just want you all here with us,” Ben explained gently.

“What about the rest of the Losers?”

“Them, too,” Ben replied. Richie heard a distant voice over the line and then Ben responding. “Bev just finished talking to Eddie. He promised to take the kids out of school the Friday before and take off, too. So you guys are coming.”

“You’re seriously going to pay for all the Losers, plus us AND our kids?” Richie asked incredulously.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you guys getting married again or something?”

Ben laughed.

“No, something bigger than that. We’ll see you then, okay?”

Richie sighed.

“Okay, but this is all very mysterious and I don’t like mysterious phone calls from old friends,” Richie pointed out. “I learned my lesson from Mike.”

Ben laughed again.

“I promise this is much better than confronting a supernatural clown and childhood trauma,” he insisted. “So mark your calendar and we’ll see you then.”

“Alright,” Richie asked, puzzled. “See you then. Love you, you mysterious, handsome bastard.”

“Love you, too, Trashmouth,” Ben laughed again before hanging up.

Richie stared at the phone and frowned, wondering just what the hell he was up to. He sighed. Lydia will be excited to visit Ben and Bev but he worried about Tess. She had never been on an airplane and Richie knew, from his own overwhelming experience as a kid, that it may be too much for her. Time to schedule another appointment with the counselor and get her ready. Good thing Ben and Bev had given them plenty of time to prepare.

He rubbed at his eyes and looked back at the blank screen staring up at him. Richie sighed again, closed the laptop, and walked away.

The following Saturday, the last before October, proved unseasonably warm so after dinner, Richie and Eddie packed up the girls into the car and treated them to ice cream and a visit to the local beach before the sun set.

Thrilled and energized by their post-ice cream sugar rushes, Tess and Lydia chased each other up and down the shoreline, built and stomped on their sandcastles, played chicken with the surf, and watch the few remaining surfers in wonderment. Richie and Eddie sat on the faded beach blanket and watched them, enjoying the cool

breeze off the ocean and the sound of their daughters laughing amid the waves. It was, by all accounts, bliss.

Eddie sighed contentedly and leaned back onto his hands, one of which was covering Richie's. Richie looked over at him and smiled.

"You okay there, Eds?" he asked.

"Very okay," Eddie replied. He briefly closed his eyes. "We should do this more often."

"Yeah," Richie said. "Before winter hits and we're cooped up inside the house all the time."

Eddie nodded and straightened.

"What do you think Bev and Ben are planning in February?" he asked.

Richie shrugged.

"Who knows, but it's gotta be big," he answered.

"Maybe she's pregnant," Eddie offered.

"They wouldn't fly us all the way out there for a pregnancy announcement."

"Maybe she wants us there for the birth," Eddie laughed.

"Yeah," Richie said, rolling his eyes, "she wants us there holding up her legs as she pushes."

"We'd be great birthing coaches," Eddie replied, smirking.

"We'd have to be sedated." Richie stretched out and laid down, closing his eyes. "It has to be something else."

"I guess so," Eddie replied. "Either way, it'll be nice to get away during the winter."

"Yeah to Seattle," Richie snorted. "More grey skies and freezing temperatures."

“Well, what if we plan another trip? Someplace warmer.”

Richie cracked open one eye to gaze at his husband.

“You wanna risk two big trips in one year with the kids?” he asked. “I mean, Tess has never even been on a plane.”

“I know,” Eddie replied, “but maybe it’ll—”

They were interrupted by Richie’s phone buzzing.

“Ugh,” Richie groaned, reaching into his back pocket and blindly handing it to Eddie, “answer it for me, would ya?”

“Rich,” Eddie said quietly as he took the phone, “it’s New Hampshire. Dan.”

Richie’s eyes flew open and he instantly sat up.

“Answer it,” he said quickly, glancing at Tess and Lydia happily searching for seashells.

Eddie did so, quickly putting it on speaker and leaning in close to his husband.

“Hello?” he said cautiously.

“Hi, uh, Richie?” Dan asked.

“We’re both here,” Richie answered. “What’s going on? Everything alright?”

“Yeah, yeah, just...” Dan sighed. “Look, I think I owe you guys an apology.”

Richie felt a chill that had nothing to do with the ocean breeze.

“What are you talking about?” Eddie asked firmly and Richie noticed his grip on the phone tightened.

“Well, it’s not really...I’m technically not the one who should be apologizing,” Dan said, “and I didn’t want to say anything until I was sure so...” he trailed off and sighed again. Richie wanted to throw up.

“Look, basically, your daughter’s imaginary friend isn’t so imaginary.”

“What the fuck do you mean?” Eddie demanded.

“I mean,” Dan said quickly, “for the last couple of months, she’s been talking to my niece.”

Richie wondered how he could feel so dizzy while sitting on the solid ground. He shook his head but that only made it worse. He clenched his eyes shut and tried to quell the rising nausea in his stomach.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Eddie continued, his face pale and angry.

“My niece,” Dan repeated, as if now it made all the sense in the world, “she’s the one who your daughter has been seeing. She’s Abracadabra.” He sighed a third time before suddenly rambling, “She knows she’s not supposed to do this. But she’s in college now and she thinks she knows better. You know how kids are.”

“No, I don’t know how kids are,” Eddie replied, his voice deadly serious. “And I don’t know how an invisible, imaginary friend can be your living, breathing niece so please explain.”

Richie thought he heard Dan gulp and he couldn’t blame him. It wasn’t fun being on the receiving end of Eddie’s cold wrath.

“My niece can...she has the shine, okay? She’s the one who I’m trying to protect like you’re trying to do with your daughter,” Dan said. “But she’s not making it easy for me. And her abilities are...well, they’re very strong. She can...the researchers call it astral projection but—”

“Bullshit,” Eddie spat. “This is bullshit.”

“And she found out about your daughter,” Dan continued, “and she’s been trying to...give her advice, I guess.”

“How the fuck did she find Tess?”

“I don’t know,” Dan admitted. “Sometimes people with the shine,

they can sort of sense one another. And like I said, Abra—”

“Abra?” Richie interrupted.

“Yeah, that’s her name,” Dan said lowly. “Abra has some of the strongest abilities I’ve ever seen. Somehow they crossed paths...either literally or...mentally.”

The two men fell silent. Their daughters were shrieking with laughter and all Richie wanted to do was grab them both and immediately rush home, locking the door behind them.

“I spoke to her today,” Dan continued, “and found this all out. I suspected it earlier but, yeah. So I wanted to apologize. Like I said, she knows not to pull this sort of shit but she’s nineteen and kinda...willful.”

“Are you seriously telling me,” Eddie said slowly, “that a nineteen-year-old stranger has been visiting and speaking to my four-year-old daughter?”

There was a long pause and Richie just knew Dan had to be kicking himself.

“Not physically,” he answered lamely.

“Fuck you,” Eddie responded. “Fuck you and fuck your niece, whoever the fuck she is. We’re done. We’re going to hang up, block this number, and if hear anything at all about someone seeing our daughter, we’re calling the cops.”

“And what are you gonna tell them?” Dan replied quickly. “An invisible girl is bothering us? Look, I made Abra promise to stop. And trust me, I’ll know if she’s lying. But you have to believe that she was only trying to help.”

“Don’t care,” Eddie said.

“Your daughter’s been doing better, hasn’t she?” Dan pointed out. “No more seizures or episodes, right?” At both men’s silence, he insisted, “That’s Abra’s doing. Just remember that, okay? You can be pissed off all you want but she was...she fucked up but her heart was

in the right place.”

“We’re hanging up now,” Eddie said.

“This is a New Jersey number, right?” Dan asked suddenly.

Eddie glanced at Richie, who cleared his throat before admitting, “Yeah.”

“Look, Abra is in New York City,” he said. “I’m only telling you this because she fucked up. If you want to speak to her in person, I can...it can be arranged just please remember, she’s still a kid and she’s had some...trauma in her life.”

Both men fell silent again and Richie ran a shaking hand through his hair. Lydia called his name, waving and holding up what appeared to be a giant shell. He waved back.

“We have to go,” Richie said.

“Okay,” Dan sighed.

“And don’t call us ever again,” Eddie said, ending the call. He dropped the phone onto the blanket, his face still pinched with anger. He clenched his shaking hands into fists and shook his head, taking a deep, slow breath.

“Eddie,” Richie whispered, guilt suddenly overwhelming him. “Eddie, I—”

“Block that number,” Eddie said calmly. “I’m gonna go get the girls. It’s getting dark.”

Richie watched as his husband stood, brushed the sand of his legs, and walked towards the shore, their daughters rushing up to meet him with their hands filled with shells. He blinked when he realized he had tears in his eyes and quickly wiped them away, schooling his face into a wide grin as the girls raced up to the blanket, chattering excitedly.

“Wow, look at those,” he said, observing the shells in their outstretched hands. “That’s some excavation work, girls.”

“Daddy said we can put them in the garden,” Lydia announced happily.

“Sure, we can,” Richie agreed. “You guys ready to go?”

The girls whined and begged for another half hour but Eddie was right. The sun was setting and they knew better than to push off bedtime. Both men shook off and rolled up the blanket as the girls carefully placed their shells into a tote bag brought especially for the occasion before taking their fathers’ hands. As they walked up the beach to the boardwalk, Richie noticed Tess peering up at him curiously.

“You okay, kiddo?” he asked.

“Are *you* okay?” she responded.

Richie swallowed and nodded, smiling broadly.

“Yeah, I’m good,” he said.

Tess turned to look at Eddie but he smiled back down at her, as well. She looked as if she wanted to question them further but she was interrupted by her sister asking for ice cream on the ride home. Richie exhaled a breath, tightened his grip on his daughter’s hand, and thought only of home.

Notes for the Chapter:

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Thank you again so very much for reading and don't forget to comment!